

HE PLAYED WITH DOLLS By WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

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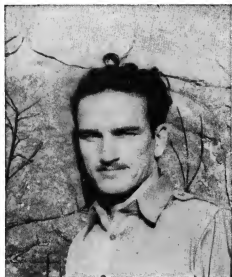


Was it a man's love or
a woman's lust that cast this

SHADOW ON THE MOON

By JOE GIBSON

MEN BEHIND AMAZING STORIES



Ed Emsler

A COUPLE of years ago, while dunking etching plates in acid deep in a Parisian *atelier*, the thought occurred to me that soon I would come face to face with the cold, cruel world. Having slid neatly from high school to the Infantry for the duration of the big blow, then on to college as a G.I., I had been pretty well sheltered from having to earn a buck. After finishing at the University of Michigan, I had returned to Europe to see it under somewhat freer rein and to study graphics a little. So, as my etching plates bubbled merrily in the brew, I went to the local cafe to sip a *pernod* or two and mull over the prospect of starving in a garret.

But it was Paris, and it was spring, so my mind wandered to other fields.

I promptly piled bag and baggage, tent and wife, on the back of my trusty motorcycle, and headed out to see more of these other fields. Some eleven countries, thirteen thousand miles, and untold flat tires later I finished up my year abroad by returning to Paris, buying a few books to read on the way back, and setting sail.

Among the books were several extremely entertaining science-fiction tales. Between waves (I'd never make a good sailor), I let the obvious idea grow. As soon as I hit shore I started knocking out samples. You know the rest.

Doing science-fiction illos is strictly fun. Cold, cruel world? Man, I've never had it so good!



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OCTOBER, 1952

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— *All* STORIES *Complete* —

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SHADOW ON THE MOON (Novel—28,000) by Joe Gibson 8

Illustrated by Bill Ashman

The World Government went after the dictators with all guns blasting and drove them underground. That left Tom Rourke with the job of routing them out again

THE INNKEEPER OF MARS (Short—3,500) by Dex E. Moore 52

Illustrated by Dick Francis

The innkeeper wanted all Terrans to stay on Mars. To keep them there, he needed a certain brand of horror. A brand of horror the Terrans brought along with them

DEADLY DUST (Novelette—11,000) by Gerald Vance 62

Illustrated by Ed Emsler

The police were tough, and they were bent upon keeping law and order. But here was a gun that shot a man out of his pants without even disturbing the crease!

HE PLAYED WITH DOLLS (Short—6,500) by William P. McGivern 84

Illustrated by Tom Beecham

Strange indeed are the ways of the weird jungle gods. Swift and terrible are the punishments meted out to the unbeliever. But why should a rag doll mean so much?

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MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE — VII (Short—5,000) Author Unborn 128

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Out of Venusia, cesspool of the universe, rises Byron, the unholy genius who is to climb to such pinnacles of greatness that all dictators will be dwarfed

IDIOT COMMAND (Short—2,000) by John Jakes 134

Illustrated by Bill Ashman

They went to the Moon in rocket ships and returned completely insane. Was there a way this phenomenon could be turned to the benefit of Mankind?

Front cover by Walter Popp, suggested by
a scene from "Shadow On The Moon"

* * * * *

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THE OBSERVATORY

by the Editor

MR. SCIENCE Fiction dropped into the office yesterday. He goes by various other names also—Mr. Murray Leinster. Mr. Will Jenkins. This last name of his always confuses me. It makes me think of Mr. Will James, who writes very fine stories about horses and draws the illustrations for same.

ANYHOW, Mr. Science Fiction dropped in and brought his daughter. Little Miss Science Fiction looks to be about twelve or thirteen years old and papa is very proud of her, as well he might be.

THE ITEM of business was a story papa had sent us. It was a very fine story. Mr. S. F. has been writing your favorite brand of fiction for 10, these many years, starting back in the Twenties, and he knows how the job should be done. The mood point was how much money he wanted for the yarn, which is laid in Greece and moves a mile a minute. He wanted an awful lot of money, which didn't surprise me a bit, so I gave it to him and he and his cute young daughter went away very happy. I was happy too. I guess everybody concerned was happy.

MR. SUCCESS lives in New York City now, and drops into the office quite regularly. He is also known as Mr. William P. McGivern. Bill is there, now, but he didn't get there overnight. He came up the long, hard, fabulous road, climbing from word to word until he could look back at millions of them and wonder where they all came from. Bill married a gal called Maureen Daly. Her name was Success too and they traveled all over Europe and had a very wonderful time of it.

AS I SAID, Bill drops into the office quite regularly and the other day he made an appointment to meet a typewriter salesman here because he needed a new typewriter, and up here he could look them over and drink coffee at the same time. The man brought two portables. Bill looked

them over and said, "I'll take this one, but I haven't got my checkbook with me." The salesman said, "That's perfectly all right, Mr. McGivern. Just send us a check whenever it's convenient."

SO BILL MCGIVERN has arrived. Any time you are a free-lance writer and a salesman trusts you for the price of a typewriter—brother, you've arrived!

THE OTHER day I had occasion to write an article on the care and feeding of the Duckbilled Platypus. I needed some data on the subject, so I went to the New York Public Library to find it. There was nothing in the circulating library—that means books you can take home with you—so I went through the reading-room files and found just what I wanted. But the book could not be removed from the premises and I'm the kind of writer who can't function unless I take the book home with me.

THAT LEFT the bookstores. In this city, on Fourth Avenue south of Fourteenth Street, there are dozens of bookstores—so many that you get the idea everybody reads, which is not true, of course, because a great many people only look at the pictures.

ANYHOW, Lila Shaffer and I went down to comb the bookstores. And, man, how we combed. I got tired of asking for what I wanted, so we took turns. After a while we both got tired of asking and went to a place and had lunch.

I'M WRITING this because I thought you'd be interested in the fact that all those many bookstores, with millions of volumes, have nothing on the aforementioned subject. Also, to let you know why I won't be writing an article on the care and feeding of Duckbilled Platypuses. After all, who gives a damn.

—HB

LOOK—DON'T LISTEN

By Wyman Tate

IT IS NO secret that modern aerial transportation could not exist were it not for radio. But even radio is inadequate for today's terrific density of planes in airport regions—and so radar has stepped in. Planes are watched by ground stations no matter what the weather because of radar. And in turn the humble telephone links these ground stations so that the position of an incoming plane is known from a half dozen points. With the coming of super-high-speed jet airplanes and the possibility of rockets, even this magnificent communications network is inadequate.

Fortunately the notion that "one picture is worth a thousand words" comes into play. Television as a ground-to-ground, ground-to-air medium is entering the situation, and promises to relieve a lot of headaches.

While the grand-scale application of TV is still some way off, it has been introduced experimentally at the London airport. A simplified TV transmitter and receiver enables ordinary written or typed messages to be transmitted in a pulse—and this includes the invaluable drawings, or "pictures", which can so simplify any explanation. So far this technique of televising messages has been limited to ground-to-ground work. Shortly it will be introduced to ground-to-plane practice, and an incoming pilot may have on the screen in front of him a written and drawn message describing the situation at any moment.

When we think of TV now, it is usually in terms of an entertainment medium rather than a communications medium. Of course that is important, but it is in straight communications that TV is going to demonstrate its capacities. It will replace radio in many instances, because the spoken word is certainly not as flexible and as informative as the written—which can be accompanied by descriptive diagrams and pictures. The gigantic scale on which amusement TV has spread and is spreading everywhere has worked the desirable effect of producing an infinite simplification in circuitry and has cut down the complexity of apparatus. While TV sets will never quite be reduced to the amazingly simple "crystal set" or "transistor set" of radio, it's a certainty that they will end up a lot simpler than they are now.

The eye takes precedence over the ear—so look, don't listen!

LUNAR LUST

By
T. Locar

IT IS AN old truism that the scientists who devise the horrible weapons of modern warfare rarely think of themselves as killers—or of their weapons as such. Instead they preserve a sort of scientific objectivity and calm which transcends the passions of war, even though at that very moment their weapons may be raining havoc and destruction upon their foes. In a sense they often think of themselves as utterly detached from the actual military and political events. They see their duty and they do it. For example, while some scientists were disturbed over the moral implications of the atom bomb, nearly everyone saw there was no choice but to create this inevitable scientific miracle. In the long run, they knew the good would outweigh the bad.

In similar fashion, enemy scientists worked in their laboratories. This is perhaps best illustrated by the famous V-2 rocket, the prototype of spaceships to come. The scientist responsible for this miraculous device, Dr. Wernher von Braun, maintained throughout the war a sort of "space-ship view" rather than weapon idea. That it was a weapon to him was incidental. Basically he wanted a Moon-rocket!

Von Braun was brought to this country along with hundreds of other scientists who now work for our country, ostensibly creating guided missiles and the like. But, as the director of the guided-missile program remarked to an inquiring reporter, "Von Braun?—oh, he's interested only in one thing. He wants to get to the Moon!"

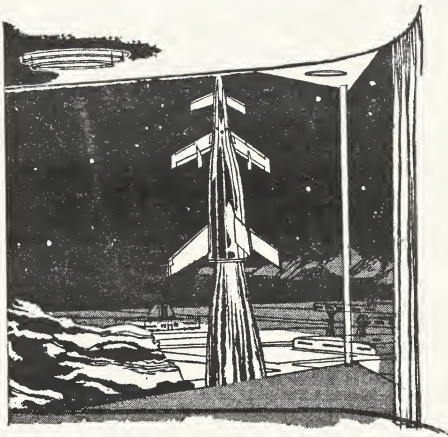
In personal anecdotes, von Braun tells of how, during development stages at Peenemünde on the Baltic seacoast, he saw the V-2 as Man's first space-probing rocket even while the generals were thinking of it as a bombardment weapon. Of course he realized its usefulness as a weapon, but he was basically concerned with the V-2 as the first step into conquering space. Even as the V-2's were thundering down on London, von Braun had even more gigantic rockets on the drawing boards, one of which, the A-5, was scheduled to be used against New York! Von Braun thought less of this ocean-spanner as a weapon than as a potential Moon-striker.

Not much is said these days about what is being done with the big rockets, but von Braun is directing the American program. Knowing his lust for landing on Luna, you can be sure that everything human is being done to plant a rocket there!

SHADOW ON THE MOON



The crushed body was a gruesome thing



When the world's dictators and thugs all ganged up and went underground, Tom Rourke found he had far more to worry about than the gorgeous Dorihea of the beautiful legs

"NEW YORK is on the line, sir!" Rourke's secretary sent her voice through the intercom in dulcet-toned warbles.

Tom Rourke stopped pounding the typewriter to whirl around in his swivel chair and reach across his desk, flipping a switch from *intercom* to *videophone*. The wide, twenty-four-

inch screen exploded its frosty white expanse into a sharp color-image.

"Hi, Tom." Bill Warner's fleshy features were creased in a smile. The advertising manager of *Spaceways* magazine wore a snappy blue suit with a scarlet silk kerchief tucked in at the throat. On the wall behind him was a blow-up of a *Spaceways* cover, featuring the S-90, the Earth-

Moon supply ship. "I got this advertising layout on the AiRocket experimental ship here on my desk," Warner said. "That what you're calling about?"

"Right," Tom affirmed. "Can you have one of your staff artists delete the control surface from that rudder? Research just told me we're using a solid rudder fin—no break between rudder stab and movable control surface."

Warner, who wasn't an aeronautical engineer, frowned in puzzlement. "Rudder stab and control surface?"

"That line showing a break in the rudder surface," Tom explained patiently. "Delete it. It'll be a solid rudder."

"Oh!" Comprehension dawned on Warner's cherubic face.

"We want the ad picture to be as up-to-date as possible," Tom said. "After the experimental job's tested, there'll probably be a few more changes; the final production model will be slightly different. But we don't want it too different; we want the people to see pictures of this experimental job and get used to the ships before we put them on the market."

"Okay," Warner nodded. "I'll take care of it for you. Say, how about an article on the test flight?"

"For your magazine?" Rourke taunted jovially. "You sure airockets would fit in with galactic space-tales and time-travel adventures?"

"It's science-fiction, chum," Warner retorted. "But the boss-man has already asked about such an article. After all, you guys *are* the first ones to give Mr. Average Man his own little rocket ship!"

"Uh-huh. Good angle!" Rourke grabbed a pencil and scribbled a notation on his desk pad. "But I'd prefer to wait and see how the test flights turn out; it *could* be a flop, y'know.

How long before I'd have to give a definite answer?"

"I'll ask. Maybe we can leave a hole for you and plug it up with a short story if you can't come through. Thirty-five-hundred words okay?"

"That's a big-enough hole."

"I'll let you know." Warner grinned and waved a pink hand. The screen went frosty blank.

Rourke flipped it off and started to turn back to his typewriter, but the little signal-light winked blue again. He flipped it on. The screen blinked into color and the gray-haired visage of Ralph Henderson McWilliams, President of AiRockets, Inc., glowered from it.

"Tom, my boy, stop chasing that secretary and toddle up here to Daddy's office," he commanded in stern mockery. "The devil just walked through the Main Gate. I want you to be present when I spit in his eye!"

"Okay, Mac." Rourke switched off and climbed onto his feet.

MISS DOROTHEA FINCH gave a low, caressing whistle as Rourke breezed through the outer office. He raised a hand in fond farewell, feeling that nice glow in his tummy that Miss Finch's whistles always gave him. Miss Finch was, after all, a very neatly stacked blonde, even if it was a false blonde. She had nice, tanned legs below her short, flared whipskirt, and a very firm bosom supporting her plunging neckline. It was something to be considered whistle-bait by a gal like that! He proceeded down the long, wide corridor to the elevators, a crooked grin lingering on his face. He had a strong, appealing face, as the girls around Administration had duly noted: a firm jaw, strong mouth, cool gray eyes beneath dark

brows, and curly dark hair. Mr. Thomas Rourke, twenty-seven, Advertising & Public Relations Manager for AiRockets, Inc., and a bachelor.

He took an elevator up to the fifth floor and strolled along another corridor toward McWilliams' office. The outer wall of the corridor was transparent, looking out over the wide company airfield. There were the big hangars looming in squat rows along the edge of the field, and the curved, sprawling plant buildings behind them. A small personnel jetcopter stood out on the parking ramp, but the rest of the field was empty, the big hangar doors closed and lifeless.

It wouldn't be lifeless a few months from now. AiRockets was a new company, pioneering a new type of aircraft. The complete layout represented a good half-million dollars. When experiments were concluded and production began, the airfield would be humming with activity.

Rourke entered McWilliams' outer office, waved dutifully to the battery of secretaries, and strode casually through the entrance labeled PRIVATE in big chrome letters.

MAC WAS sprawled wearily behind his nine-foot curve of desk, a stubby cigar protruding from his granite jaw. He waved a blunt hand to the big chair beside the desk. "Better strap yourself in for some high-g maneuvers," he said. "Bullock just called from the Main Gate, saying a Mr. Johann Czecmelowicz"—he pronounced it "Smellowitz" and paused, then, to spell it—"Of Volks-Aero Industries, Limited, has arrived from Budapest, Hungary, to have a little chat with us."

Rourke slid into his chair, hiding the sudden excitement within him under a completely blank expression. "Who's Volks-Aero Industries?" he asked in feigned innocence.

Mac stared at him, exasperated. Then he explained with mocking patience, "Volks-Aero just happen to be the leading jetcopter outfit in Europe. They've had the European and Middle East jetcopter markets tied up for years, freezing out all American jetcopter interests—"

"And our little rocket craft are due to upset their apple-cart," Rourke concluded swiftly.

Mac nodded. "Sometimes you almost sound human. This Czecmelowicz is an agent from Aero Solicitors of Budapest, he says—they're legal representatives for Volks-Aero. So check your guns; he should be in here any minute."

Rourke settled himself comfortably and lit a cigarette. He was accustomed to Mac's verbal references to aerial warfare; the Old Man had been a teen-age jet fighter pilot when the U.N. was playing checkers with the Chinese Reds, using Korea for a checkerboard—which had been all of fifty years ago. Mac was a sly old-timer in his late sixties, as tough as tempered steel, with a right leg from the knee down of plastic, sponge-rubber, and aluminum tubing. He'd been around.

Mr. Johann Czecmelowicz entered with the pompous air of a man accustomed to liveried servants and cocktails at four. He was a plump, middle-aged man wearing dark suit, cravat, and bowstring tie in the Continental fashion. Introductions were politely exchanged and he seated himself before Mac's desk, balancing a thick black briefcase precisely upon his knees. He spoke English with a clipped accent.

"Now, gentlemen, to business," he said. "As you know, I am here as legal representative for Volks-Aero Industries, Limited. My clients are exceedingly interested in your...ah...novel enterprise, here."

"I can imagine," Mac drawled wryly. "You will find, Mr. Czecmeloweicz, that we have registered our Statement of Intent with the U.N. World Commerce Commission, to license our airockets legally to local manufacturers in both Europe and the Middle East for the usual royalties."

"But you have not yet filed an International Patent on your rocket craft, Mr. McWilliams!"

Mac shook his head. "We aren't out of the experimental stage, just yet. But our Statement of Intent covers the patent application."

"Yes, of course. Providing your rocket craft works."

Mac stiffened. "Just what do you mean by that?"

CZECMELOWEICZ gave him a bland smile. "It is understandable that my clients express doubt as to your success, Mr. McWilliams. Jetcopters have been manufactured for the past thirty years as an accepted, trustworthy product. It has provided the safest private transportation in history, and its affect on your American society has already been profound. All you Americans live in country homes, your major cities becoming mere commercial centers, your small towns virtually disappearing into thin air! Jetcopters are a world-wide success. However, your *rocket ships*..." He shrugged complacently.

"The jetcopter replaced the automobile easily enough," Mac growled irascibly. "But you didn't come here to argue about that."

"Indeed not," Czecmeloweicz agreed. "My clients may express doubt in your enterprise, but they also believe in caution. Should your craft be successful, naturally they would become a dangerous competitor to Volks-Aero jetcopters. We are willing to compromise by purchasing a con-

trolling interest in your company's stock!"

"A contro—" Mac broke off, choking on the words, and stared unbelievably at the calm, self-assured little man. Slowly, Mac parted his thin lips and got his wind back. He kept his voice as flat and smooth as the surface of a frozen lake. "Naturally," he said, "you expect to be thrown out of my office."

"I merely hoped you would consider the matter," Czecmeloweicz corrected him, completely unperturbed. "I shall be here for one week. You may contact me at the Hotel Atometro."

"And if I don't?" Mac spat at him.

Czecmeloweicz repeated the delicate shrug of his shoulders. "I shall return to Budapest and inform my clients that you are not interested, naturally. But I hope you will reconsider." He rose, smiling. "For your benefit, Mr. McWilliams, I shall wait one week."

Then he gave a curt bow and strode to the door. It closed firmly behind him as he went out.

Mac stared after him through a long moment of silence. Then the Old Man slouched back in his chair and swiveled to face Rourke. "What d'you make of that, sonny-boy?"

"I make a dog-eat-dog fight of it," Rourke answered quietly, leaning forward to flick his cigarette ash into the tray on the desk. "Volks-Aero will probably drag us into World Court on charges of Capital Exploitation, if we don't cut them the big slice of our cake."

Mac snorted derisively. "Volks-Aero wouldn't have a legal leg to stand on! People accepted the jetcopter over the automobile because most of the world's highways—particularly our own—had practically crumbled to pieces, what with government funds going to defense and traffic overload pounding the roads to bits. Governments latched stiff highway taxes on

the people, and the people retaliated by buying jetcopters. Now, everybody flies!"

"But they fly jetcopters," Rourke remarked comprehendingly.

Mac gave an emphatic nod. "They've accepted the windmills. Jetcopters are easy to fly and they're safe. Anything breaks on her and she automatically sets her rotors to let you down slower than a parachute! The world has accepted them and will continue to do so for some time to come.

"That means they won't accept our airockets so readily. The airocket is new, different. And because of that, Volks-Aero can no more claim Capital Exploitation than the Martians, if there are any. All they can claim is that we'll be breaking their jetcopter monopoly in Europe—and it's about time somebody did! They haven't improved their copters by a single bolt or rivet in the past twenty years!"

"They don't have to," Rourke retorted, grinning. "Nobody else can compete against them so long as they continue to buy the complete commercial franchise in every European country. We're the only ones who could compete, since our private airockets come under a separate franchise."

"**A**ND THEY can't buy up those franchises unless they manufacture airockets themselves," Mac muttered worriedly. "So what the devil did this character expect to gain by coming here? A 'controlling interest' in our stock, huh! What'd he mean by that?"

"Well, they certainly knew we'd turn them down," Rourke concluded. "So now it's their move again. Whatever it is, it'll probably tell us exactly what they do mean."

"Ummm. Smells bad." Mac kicked

his chair around and glowered down at the airfield spread below his window-wall. "If I didn't know our atomic rocket unit is the only one of its kind on Earth, I'd think they were going to manufacture airockets and freeze us out!"

You don't know how close that is to the truth! Rourke thought, staring at the back of the tousled gray head. Aloud, he said, "I guess there's nothing we can do until they've shown their hand. It could be a complete bluff, or they may have expected us to be no more than a shoestring outfit. Maybe they thought we'd jump at the money if they offered to buy stock to—"

He broke off his rambling suppositions and both men turned as the outer door opened.

A middle-aged secretary stood framed in the light. "The tower just reported Skid Holloway coming in, Mr. McWilliams!"

"Thank you, Miss DeVries." Mac swung back to face Rourke. "Get down there and meet him, will you, Tom? Tell him I want to see him. He starts test flights on the XR-1 tomorrow morning and this thing today has me worried—"

"Want me to call Bascomb and Aimes?" Rourke asked. The law firm of Bascomb, Bascomb and Aimes handled AiRockets' legal affairs.

Mac shook his head. "I'll call them later. If this guy is going to hang around for a week, there'll be plenty of time to check with Volks-Aero and Aero Solicitors of Budapest to make sure he's *bona fide*. Get Skid Holloway up here."

"*AiRocket Tower to N-five-two-eight. Commence final approach at three miles, altitude seven-fifty, compass twenty-nine degrees. Report for clearance, over.*"

"Five-two-eight to tower. Wilco, over."

The flat, metallic voices came from the little radio speaker behind Rourke's head. He was sprawled in the reclining seat of the three-wheeled field scooter, waiting down on the parking lane for Skid Holloway to come in. He lit a cigarette and gazed into the warm blue afternoon sky, expectantly.

"Five-two-eight to tower. Am in final approach, gear down, props set. Over."

"Five-two-eight, you are cleared for landing. Use Runway Seven: wind south-southeast fifteen miles. All private craft diverted from your approach. Over."

"Roger, all clear."

THE PLANE appeared first as a tiny black splinter near the horizon, then grew rapidly in size. It was an old government surplus U.N. Patrol Fighter—one of the famous Lockheed PF-170's flown by the old U.N. Combined Air Fleet when world preparedness had cancelled all possibility of the Soviet Union's ever winning an atomic war; and the world waited for Russian policies to change to more peaceful intentions, which finally happened with a somewhat bloody purge inside the Kremlin. The U.N. Patrol pilots had cut a dashing figure in world history during their brief, happily inactive careers. Their close-fitting blue uniforms, designed to be worn under the old insulated, air-conditioned, pressurized flying suits, had affected men's clothing styles so that snug-fitting suits were now the fashion.

But the old PF-170 was still a good aircraft. Particularly for companies whose business demanded an occasional fast trip of five thousand miles or

so. With her big, counter-rotating supersonic props driven by gas turbines, she could cover long distances as fast as a jet plane, burning less fuel than either jets or reciprocating engines. Many companies had hastened to buy the worn, surplus planes, despite the fact that they accommodated only a pilot and one passenger, formerly a radar operator.

Skid Holloway flared his N-528 out and eased her tricycle gear neatly onto the runway. She slid across the field, braking her headlong speed, swung easily into the taxi strip, and came rolling-over to the parking lane with her big props fluttering noisily.

Rourke nudged the little field scooter into gear and drove over to meet her.

The props whirled to a halt and the thick, pressurized blister swung back over the cockpit. Holloway waved a greeting and clambered down from the big, fat fuselage with a plastic carton under his arm. Rourke stopped the scooter and waited for him.

"Well, if it isn't old commercialism himself!" Holloway exclaimed, grinning. "How's the advertising business, Tom?"

"Fine," Rourke answered. "How's the flying business?" He felt the usual tingle of awe as he grinned up at Holloway's wide, freckled features. Skid Holloway had been on the third expedition to the Moon, had walked the surface of another world. He was a short, stocky man thirty-four years old; retired, now, since he was too old to stand the physical strain of space flight. They had other young men to take the ships out to Lunar Base now. And the first expedition had landed on Mars.

"Me and the flying business is going to have a cup of coffee," Hallo-

way replied, tossing the plastic carton into the back seat and crawling into the scooter beside Rourke. "Had some nice weather in Pittsburgh. Nice and soupy, with thundershowers."

Rourke swung the scooter around and headed back toward the streamlined pile of the Administration Building. "Mac wants to see you, Skid. He says you start test flights on the XR-1 in the morning."

"What?" Halloway exploded indignantly. "What gives with the Old Man? I've just finished a little forty-five-hundred-mile jaunt to get a spec analysis on that rocket nozzle for him! Man, if I've got to crawl out at two in the morning to test-hop his rocket baby—"

"I think he wants to speed it up," Rourke cut in pensively. "It looks like somebody may try to give us some trouble."

"Trouble? What kind of trouble?"

"Commercial franchise trouble, maybe." Rourke flicked his cigarette ashes over the side of the scooter. "A legal representative from Volks-Aero Industries, Limited, paid us a call this afternoon. Mac'll tell you about it."

"Okay, but what's the pitch?" Halloway frowned in puzzlement.

"I don't know for sure," Rourke answered half-truthfully. "Mac can't figure it out, either. But just between you and me, Skid, I'm going to ask you a favor."

"Sure, Tom. Name it."

Rourke turned to look at him, levelly. "When you climb into that XR-1 in the morning, *be damned sure it hasn't been tampered with!*"

HALLOWAY accepted the advice with a nod and a thoughtful silence. They pulled up before the building steps and left the scooter,

entering the wide, cool corridors within. Rourke clapped Halloway's shoulder, said he'd see him around, and went back to his office. Miss Dorothea Finch smiled at him in the wall mirror in the midst of applying her lipstick.

Rourke glanced at the wall clock and hid a grin. It was twenty minutes yet until quitting-time. He went on into his private office and slumped into the chair behind his desk. He had twenty minutes to wait. Twenty minutes until all the office people would be gone and the videophone operator would leave the company switchboard on automatics.

He slid down in his chair and swung his feet up on the corner of his desk, then pulled open a bottom drawer and slipped out a heavy cloth-bound book. The gilt-letter title was **WORLD CRIME SYNDICATES**. He flipped it open, extracted a bookmark, and commenced reading.

...Thus, there is conclusive evidence that the very success of the UNO as a world government, and the mere existence of the U.N. World Police, is a direct cause of the international criminal organizations and syndicates which exist today.

If there were no UNO, no World Police, the present organizers of world crime would be cozily situated in various national governments as dictators, as military commanders, or as members of political state police. They would go about their chosen profession of brutality, power through fear, and sadistic terror without the slightest thought of possible reprisal.

With the establishment of world justice, enforced by the U.N. World Court and the World Police, these former despots have been forced underground. They are now struggling for dominance in a new realm: the realm of international smuggling, narcotics, thiev-

ery and murder. Recent history has provided them with sound training for such criminal activities. They have developed cunning, resourcefulness, and organizational ability; they are rapidly organizing world crime into a group of syndicates with such far-reaching influence that they may become as great a threat to world security as any powerful nation bent on conquest....

Rourke read on through the pages, smiling grimly. Minutes ticked away in silence. When he finally looked up, it was five minutes past quitting time. He stowed the book back in the bottom drawer, rose and crossed to the door. Poking his head into the outer office he saw that Miss Finch had departed for home. Grinning his satisfaction he closed the door and went back to his desk, sitting down and flipping on the videophone set. He dialed a number and waited, lighting a cigarette.

A COLD, thin-lipped face splashed onto the screen. Beneath the face, a glowing legend ran: United Air Delivery Service— Anywhere in Atom Town, Anytime.

"What can I do for you?" Thin-lips asked. He wore a soiled green undershirt and needed a shave.

"Get me Shadow One," Rourke said. "This is Shadow Nine."

Thin-lips vanished instantly. A tough, square-jawed man with short-cropped brown hair replaced him. "Oh, it's you, Rourke. Anything new?"

"It's here, Manny," Rourke told him.

Inspector Emanuel Borsach narrowed his eyes comprehendingly. "Who is it?"

"Calls himself Johann Czecmelo-weicz," Rourke answered, then spelled

it. Manny's gaze dropped below the screen's level as he jotted it down. "He said he was from Aero Solicitors of Budapest, Hungary," Rourke added. "They're supposed to be the legal representatives for Volks-Aero Industries, Limited."

"I'll get it off to headquarters," Manny said. "Maybe World Police Frankfurt offices can check it on their files."

"Get it soon as possible," Rourke pleaded. "It may be urgent. Old Man McWilliams wants to start test-flights on his experimental ship in the morning."

"I'll call you back in a few hours," Manny promised. "Your home number?"

"I'll be there. I'm going over to check on Doc Simakov at Southwest Atomics—"

"Don't tip your hand!"

"I won't." A tight grin twisted Rourke's mouth. "But there are two men technically responsible for the airocket. One's old Prof Thornton Weigand, who developed the atomic rocket unit. They won't know about him yet—McWilliams has him hidden inside the company's research labs—"

"And this Simakov? He's at Southwest Atomics?"

Rourke nodded. "The project actually began with his synthetically produced inertium gas. He's written several papers on it for scientific journals, and it's pretty well known that he's tied in with AiRockets, Incorporated. They just might strike at him first."

"Better get acquainted with him then," Manny approved. "Can you approach him without exposing yourself?"

"McWilliams told me he can almost believe Volks-Aero is prepared to go

into airocket production as our competitors," Rourke said. "I can take it from there and ask Simakov if he's received any inquiries from Volks-Aero on his inertium gas. That'll give me an excuse to tell him all about this Czecmeloweicz."

"Where's Czecmeloweicz now?"

"Said he was staying at the Hotel Atometro."

Manny grinned without mirth. "We'll put a tail on him. Might lead to something."

"Don't let it lead to his discovery that you're following him, that's all," Rourke warned. "So long as they don't know we're wise to them, they won't be looking for me."

"Right," Manny agreed. "And walk soft on the eggshells yourself, Rourke. If they ever do have reason to suspect you, they'll kill you without hesitation. Good hunting, fellow!" The screen went blank.

Rourke stared at it for a moment, then sighed and snapped the set off. He closed up his typewriter, locked the desk, and rose. Leaving his office, he proceeded along the silent, empty corridor to the elevators. A crooked smile tugged at one corner of his mouth.

Business was beginning to pick up!

THE DECISION had been reached three years ago, in the spacious, glass-walled office high up from the street level in the United Nations Center. A wizened, bald-headed little man known to every Intelligence agency in the world had sat behind those soundproof portals labeled *World Police Headquarters* and put his finger on the map where Atom Town, Nevada, was located. AiRockets, Inc., had just been formed; its location was Atom Town.

The decision had been that AiRock-

ets, Inc., was too ripe a plum for a certain world crime syndicate to overlook. This particular syndicate happened to deal in technical and industrial secrets, stealing them and selling them to the highest bidder.

AiRockets, Inc., was a pioneer company founded on a new technical development. It was all too ripe for the picking.

Anticipating the syndicate's interest in AiRockets, the chief had ordered Inspector Thomas Rourke to establish himself in the company and keep his eyes open. So Rourke became an advertising expert. He went to McWilliams with a long dossier of past experience and references in aircraft advertising. McWilliams hired him.

For Rourke it hadn't been an entirely new experience. In the past nine years he had been an Art student in Paris, a graduate petroleum engineer in Arabia, an oil-stove salesman in Mongolia, a musical-comedy actor in Russia, and a newspaper reporter in South America. In each case he had received an intensified training to prepare himself for his role.

Now, after two-and-a-half years in which he'd actually prepared a worldwide advertising campaign for AiRockets, his role was finally paying off.

At last the time had arrived for Tom Rourke, Advertising & Public Relations Manager, to take on the added role of Shadow Nine. . . .

He checked out his little jetcopter from the parking lot behind the plant buildings and lifted it into the slanting, golden rays of the sunset. The copter's wheels folded neatly into its hull.

Atom Town spread out in a blanket of low, terraced buildings nestled snugly in landscaped trees, shrubbery and lawns, warm lights glowing from

transparent walls to stud the blue shadows of the long, low valley which sheltered them. In the center of the valley, near the silvery ribbon of the river, large plant buildings stood in flat-roofed swirls and curving walls; above them rose the six-mile-high towers of the commercial center, glowing softly in pastel hues against the deepening violet of the evening sky. Tiny motes of light, like blue fireflies, swarmed back and forth over the town in orderly traffic patterns, the jetcopters of the five million residents who lived comfortably within the fifty-mile radius of pleasant countryside.

ROURKE switched on the night-light in his copter and swung east, past the fringe of the town where he could avoid the traffic patterns. He sprawled relaxed in the reclining seat, his hands resting lightly on the control wheel, gazing out through the transparent, teardrop hull. The turbine hummed faintly behind the seat and the big rotar blades made a deep, soft thrumming sound overhead.

He found a clear patch of sky with no other copters approaching and pulled the wheel back until its column snicked into neutral. The copter eased up as its rotars adjusted, and stood hovering in the faint evening breeze, its nightlight blinking alternate blue and red, warning the other craft of its standstill presence.

Casually, he swung the portable videophone screen across his lap and dialed Dr. Samuel Simakov's home number. The scientist ought to be home from Southwest Atomics by now, but it wouldn't do any harm to make sure.

"What is it please?"

The girl's face on the screen was interesting. Her jet-black hair was

curled tightly about her head, twinkling with blue highlights. She had a heart-shaped face with a slender nose, petulant lips and dark, smoldering eyes.

But the interesting factor was the lack of expression, even of curiosity, on her lips—and the deep, haunting look in her eyes. Rourke had seen that look before. It was terror.

"Is Dr. Simakov at home?" he asked calmly.

She hesitated for a moment, then spoke hurriedly. "No, Father won't be home tonight. He has another engagement. Could—do you wish to leave a message?"

"Well, I'm Tom Rourke of AiRockets, Incorporated. Are you his... ah..." Rourke made it sound casual, nonchalant.

"Roberta Simakov. Doctor Simakov is my father."

"Good evening, Miss Simakov. I'm disappointed; I did want to discuss a certain matter with your father this evening. It's rather urgent and, of course, confidential." Rourke smiled cordially. "Could I drop in and discuss it with you? The explanation is involved, I'm afraid, and I wish you'd tell your father as soon as he comes in—"

"I—I'm really—terribly sorry, Mr.—"

"Rourke," Rourke said.

"Mr. Rourke. But I have a date who's waiting; I was just leaving—" The terror had crept into her voice, upsetting its musical timbre. "If you could call Father at his office in the morning—he's usually there rather early—"

"I'm afraid this is too urgent," Rourke interrupted her. "Can't you tell me where I could find him tonight?"

"I'm—I'm afraid I can't!"

"Then please remain there," Rourke spoke commandingly. "I shall arrive in a few minutes, Miss Simakov. I'm in the air now."

Before she could frame a protest, he snapped off the screen. Folding it back into its niche, he shoved the control wheel forward and sent the copter drumming through the evening sky at top speed.

The Simakov home was over the side of the valley, nestled in the shoulder of a worn sandstone ridge, facing the western sunset over clumps of flowering cactus. It was surrounded by the wild, open Nevada desert country, dotted with the faint lights of other homes nearby. Rourke approached it skimming low over the rolling, boulder-strewn surface. He was seconds away when he saw the blue spark of a jetcopter rise up the face of the ridge and dwindle into the oncoming night sky....

CHAPTER II

KILLERS IN THE NIGHT

THE TOP speed of Rourke's Oldsmobile jetcopter coupe was one hundred and twenty-five miles per hour at five thousand feet. At higher altitude, where the rotars couldn't bite into the thinner air quite so effectively, the speed was lessened.

He had the rotars set in reverse, braking his forward velocity as he swept over the landing ramp next to the Simakov home. He eased the wheel to neutral as the copter windmilled to a halt, then pressed the wheel down in its spring-mount to descend to the ground. The airspeed indicator registered five m.p.h. against the press of the night breeze, and the radaltimeter clocked the gradual approach of the ground; the synchronizing gears locked and the landing gear

unfolded from the hull.

Rourke flipped off the turbine, slid the side-panel back, and swung his legs to the ground. Slipping out of the little craft, he strolled with feigned casualness to the small portico entrance of the house. He pressed the door-stud and heard the chimes ringing faintly within.

He saw a shapely feminine figure approach through the dark foyer beyond the glass wall; then the door slid back and Roberta Simakov was greeting him in a tense whisper. "Please come in!"

"Thank you for waiting," he said, following her back through the foyer to the soft glow of the living room. The sound of the front door automatically sliding closed behind him sent a nervous tingle up Rourke's spine.

He had a definite idea of what he was going to see. But it wasn't as bad as it might have been. At least there was no corpse on the floor.

Doc Simakov sat on the wide couch before the glowering crystal embers of the electronic fireplace, still very much alive but badly shaken. He sat hunched forward, elbows on knees, with his graying head pillowed in his hands.

An open doorway leading into a brightly lighted office-den, just off the living room to the right, revealed a scene of vast disarray—books pulled down from shelves and torn papers scattered over the floor. A few minutes more, Rourke thought, staring at it, and they'd have made a bonfire of the place!

"You must excuse Father," Roberta Simakov was saying huskily. "A man just struck him with a pair of brass knuckles!"

Rourke let an expression of profound amazement spread over his face. "What in the world—" he gasped.

"What's been going on here?"

"Robbie, call the police," Dr. Simakov spoke through his fingers. Then he raised his head from his hands and managed a wan smile at Rourke. "I must certainly thank you for coming, Mr. Rourke. Your persistence probably saved our lives!"

"Eh?" Rourke grunted incredulously. They really threw a scare into the old boy!

Roberta touched his arm. "Do sit down, Mr. Rourke. Please."

"Of course." Rourke moved over to a comfortable chair and slumped into it, facing Dr. Simakov. Roberta smiled reassuringly at her father, then crossed the room to the videophone set in the alcove.

"Now then," Rourke prompted, frowning. "What's all this about, Doctor?"

"I'm not sure I can offer any explanation for it, either to you or the police!" Simakov apologized feebly. "There were five men—they wore black masks over their faces! I had just come home and the table was being set for dinner—" He spread his hands in puzzlement. "They forced their way in with guns and held both myself and Robbie here in the living room while they entered my den. They told us to be quiet, to not give them any trouble; that's all they said. Then they went into the den and began tearing through everything as if—as if they thought I had something hidden in there and they were looking for it!"

"Is there something hidden?" Rourke asked. Across the room, Roberta's voice was a soft, insistent murmur as she spoke to the videophone screen.

"Nothing!" Simakov answered in deep perplexity. "I—I even asked what it was they were looking for—I would have given it to them! That's

when I was—" He lifted a hand to his cheek.

Rourke noticed, then, the bruise that was swelling and darkening the side of the Doctor's face.

"They told me to shut up!" Simakov added grimly.

"ISN'T THERE anything you might have had hidden in your den, Doctor?" Detective Lieutenant Ybarra's voice carried a hard, penetrating tone of inquiry.

Simakov gave him a helpless shrug. "I know of nothing. If there were something valuable I'd have a wall-safe to hold it—but I don't even have a wall-safe!"

"What are you working on at the present time? At Southwest Atomics, I mean."

"A new synthetic carbon. It can only be made in small volume, like dust particles." Simakov shook his head. "It has possible uses in the dusting techniques of preparing industrial diamonds, but there is nothing secretive about it. My work is widely published in scientific and industrial journals."

"This synthetic carbon has been publicized?"

"Even the technique of transmuting its molecular structure has been publicized!" the little scientist retorted. "We feel other atomics companies might be interested in doing some research on it."

"And there's no other work you've done that's been kept secret?" Ybarra was a patient man, and thoroughly persistent, for all his lean, wiry physique and emotional Latin temperament.

"Oh, there're a number of things," Simakov replied indifferently. "But they are the well-kept industrial secrets of the companies which bought the rights to them! The companies

have those; I don't."

"I see." The Lieutenant closed his notebook with a final snap and rose, his dark face grim with discouragement. The two uniformed Sky Troopers noticed it and shuffled their feet impatiently, then leaned back against the wall again.

Ybarra paced over to where Rourke was standing beside Miss Simakov's chair. His dark gaze met Rourke's directly.

"You were coming to see Dr. Simakov on an urgent matter, Mr. Rourke? So urgent it could not wait until morning?"

Rourke nodded. "I called ahead, of course, to see if the Doctor was home—"

"It's very fortunate that you did," Ybarra interrupted with almost a strain of suspicion in his voice. "Would you mind telling me the exact nature of that urgent matter?"

Careful, boy! Rourke warned himself mentally. "Why, as I said—it's really a business matter. We have reason to suspect strong competition from a certain European firm, and I wanted to know if that firm had made any inquiries to Dr. Simakov regarding his inertium gas, which is used in our aircraft—airrockets, I mean—"

"This inertium gas is an industrial secret owned by your company, AiRockets, Incorporated?"

"Naturally. We bought the rights to it."

"And if anyone wanted to steal it, they'd find it in your offices." Ybarra nodded solemnly. "Very well, Mr. Rourke. I guess that's all here—" He turned as a uniformed Police Technician came out of the office-den.

"All through in here, Lieutenant," the Technician reported.

"Clear the men out then," Ybarra instructed. "Dr. Simakov would probably like to get his den back in or-

der." He turned and walked back to stand before the little scientist. "We'll do our best on this, sir," he promised, "though I confess there's little to go on. One last question, if you don't mind."

"Of course not!" Simakov approved readily.

"Have you received any inquiries about your inertium gas?"

"Why, no—not that I recall." Simakov looked toward Rourke. "What was the name of that firm?"

"Volks-Aero Industries, Limited," Rourke said.

"No, no inquiries from them," Simakov concluded.

"Then that's it. Good evening, Dr. Simakov."

THE SCIENTIST rose and shook hands, then accompanied the Lieutenant to the door. Troopers and Technicians filed out past them.

Rourke gazed after them thoughtfully. He could almost picture the exact images that were flashing through Ybarra's mind: the Lieutenant suspected strongly that either he or Dr. Simakov—or both of them—was lying. Discreet inquiries would be made at both their companies to check their stories.

Rourke wondered vaguely if the crime syndicate had placed any of its agents within the Atom Town Police Department.

They usually did.

"Care for a drink?" Roberta asked.

He became aware of her looking up at him with a quizzical smile. "I could use one," he admitted. "Whiskey."

"Same as mine." She rose and crossed the room to the liquor cabinet, a boyish swagger in her long-limbed stride. "Soda or water?"

"Water." He strolled after her, listening to the dry sounds of voices

from the foyer. Dr. Simakov was bidding goodnight to Detective Lieutenant Jose Ybarra.

Roberta finished pouring, turned and handed him his drink, gazing up at him over the rim of her glass with dark, questioning eyes. "You don't like the police, do you?" she asked quietly.

"It's that man, Ybarra," Rourke answered lamely. "A wiry man like him ought to be tempestuous, hot-tempered. He isn't, though—he's a glacier! The man unnerves me!" Suiting the action to the word he took a healthy swig of his drink. Its warm glow trickled down and burst in his stomach.

"Perhaps that's why he was made a detective," Roberta teased, smiling.

Dr. Simakov came in from the foyer and hurried toward them.

"So Robbie's mixed you a drink? Good!" He reached up and rested a hand on Rourke's shoulder. "Hardly a hospitable welcome for you, Mr. Rourke—police and all that. I'm very sorry."

"On the contrary, Doctor, it was a privilege to arrive in your hour of need," Rourke consoled him with a grin. "Makes the shine on my armor seem a bit brighter."

SIMAKOV broke into an appreciative chuckle. "Well, you certainly came galloping to the rescue!"

"But I didn't even realize it!" Rourke protested jovially. "If I had, I'd probably have turned tail and run like a rabbit!"

"I doubt that very much, Mr. Rourke!" With a bright smile, Miss Simakov moved up close to him, so she was looking up into his face.

Rourke gave her a startled look that wasn't entirely feigned, and shrank away from her. "...Er... Miss Simakov!"

She whirled and burst into a bright, merry laughter which her father shared, gray brows upraised. "Really!" she exclaimed, facing Rourke again. "I think our Prince Charming deserves a kiss!"

"Let's control ourselves, Miss Simakov," he retorted seriously. His tones stilled the merriment in her face—but if she embraced him, Rourke knew she would be thoroughly shocked to feel the holstered guns beneath his padded jacket. He turned his gaze to her father.

"Regarding that matter I came to see you about, Doctor—your company has reserved the rights to your inertium gas for any purposes other than those technically described in the agreement with AiRockets, Incorporated—"

Simakov nodded, busily mixing himself a drink at the liquor cabinet. "The rights are reserved to sell the inertium gas process to other companies for other uses," he affirmed.

"Has any other company bought that process?"

Simakov turned and stared at him with raised brows. "If one has, I haven't heard about it! Be glad to check on it at the company, though, and let you know in the morning." He tasted his drink and came over to Rourke. "Why do you ask? Do you tie it in with this competitor firm—this Volks-Aero Industries you mentioned?"

"There might be a tie-in," Rourke said.

"If there was, it would mean some company was using the process for some purpose other than airockets, and then selling it again to this Volks-Aero; that what you're driving at?" Simakov peered up at him quizzically. The side of the scientist's face was now stiff, badly discolored. **Roberta**,

stared at it with a look of concern.

"It would be decidedly illegal for any company to resell the process to Volks-Aero," Rourke said comprehensively. "We could drag them before the World Court on charges of Capital Exploitation for that."

"Doesn't seem reasonable that they'd try it then, does it?" Simakov asked.

Rourke took another swallow of his drink and spoke over the glass. "Doesn't seem reasonable for a gang of hoodlums to force their way in on you, either!"

Simakov's expression went blank. "I still fail to see a connection. What would a raid on my den have to do with reselling the process? I keep no legal documents that would have any bearing on that."

"They may have thought you did," Rourke lied amiably. "Anyway, look it up for me, will you?"

"Very well. I'll call you in the morning."

"Then it's settled." Rourke finished his drink and crossed over to set his empty glass on the liquor cabinet. "I know you two haven't had dinner yet, and neither have I, so I'd best be going—"

"Stay for dinner with us!" Miss Simakov suggested quickly.

"I'd like to," Rourke said, grinning—and it was the truth. "But I've another engagement tonight. You'll excuse me?"

She followed him to the front door. Her father let them go, having shook hands with Rourke, and probably didn't even listen to them. She took Rourke by the arm and he grinned in the dark, feeling her fingers caress his hard biceps exploringly. She stopped him outside on the portico.

"You will come see us again?"

"Certainly," he promised. "You're quite beautiful, Miss Simakov."

"For that you can call me Robbie!" she exclaimed teasingly. "Good night, Tom—that is your name, isn't it? Tom?"

"Yeah. Good night, Robbie." He turned and strode briskly out to his copter.

HE HAD a small, seven-room house set in the trees near the river, on the outskirts of Atom Town not far from AiRockets, Inc.

The living room was a typically cozy sanctum of deep blue and mirror and transparent walls set in swirling lines with curved lumps of furniture clustered about the deep carpet. It had the austere, mechanical perfection of arrangement that proclaimed it a bachelor's abode, unchanged from the precise pattern set by the little multi-armed house robot during the weekly cleaning.

Rourke flipped on the soft glow of the floorlights as he entered. His sweeping scrutiny of the room noted that nothing had been changed, no item disturbed from its accustomed place, nor any footprints in the springy surface of the cunningly tell-tale rug. Peeling off his jacket, he pulled a Luger from its holster and slipped it into his belt, then threw the jacket over the back of a chair. He crossed the room and sprawled before the television panel facing the full-length mirror wall of the screen. The controls rested below his right hand. An auxiliary panel was within reach of his left; he turned to it, pressed a button beneath a small placard of a hot beef sandwich, another under a cup of black coffee. Then, content to let the house robot bring it to him, he settled back and flicked on the television screen.

A GIRL singer was doing a slow wiggle when the musical chimes of the videophone sounded above the

throbbing symphony. Rourke sighed, flicked the television off, and rose. Cramming the last of his sandwich into his mouth, he crossed the room to the videophone alcove, slid into its seat, and flipped on the screen.

Inspector Emanuel Borsach glared at him. "Stop watching that Channel Thirteen! You're not old enough yet." Then Manny grinned. "We've got a tail on your tail's tail."

"Who?" Rourke asked curtly.

"Police," Manny said. "Followed you from the Simakov home. We caught the alarm on the Police short-wave and sent a man out to watch. What happened?"

"Gang of thugs muscled in on Simakov and his daughter," Rourke informed him. "Acted like they were looking for something. I came along in time to break up the party before it got too rough. The local cops are suspicious but you can't blame them—no robbery, no other motive. A Detective Lieutenant Jose Ybarra was there."

"Know him—he's all right," Manny said. "Your pal, Johann Czecmeloweicz, gave the order on that raid, though. We caught him on his way to dinner in the Hotel Atometro. Our boy watched with considerable interest as a waitress gave him a menu—they use girl waitresses there, you know, not robots; high-class joint—and this fellow slips an *a la carte* sheet from the menu, slips it into his pocket, then pulls out another sheet and fastens it on the menu. The waitress took his order, carried the menu off, and switched a *a la cartes* again when she thought nobody was looking."

"She's their contact?"

"Little gal named Betty Lou Johnson. Lives at the Spaceport Motel, according to Atometro's personnel directory. One of our boys is a bell-hop there now."

"Any more on Czecmeloweicz?"

"World Police Frankfurt want a photostat on him for identification. There is a small outfit called Aero Solicitors in Budapest, and it did handle a small legal matter for Volks-Aero several months ago, but Volks-Aero claims no contract was signed and Aero Solicitors is definitely not their legal representative."

"This is our bunch then. Aero Solicitors must be their front outfit."

"One of them, anyway," Manny agreed. "We'll get a stat of Czecmeloweicz to Frankfurt on the midnight strato-express. Now, brace yourself for the take-off!"

"Why?"

"Little Betty Lou Johnson got off duty half an hour ago and went down to a bar near the spaceport. She's sitting there now with five tough-looking goons who just landed on the roof in a copter sedan. They've been joined by a chap named Marty Williams—know him?"

"No."

"He's one of the plant guards out at AiRockets Incorporated. He goes on duty out there tonight."

Rourke pursed his lips reflectively. "And Halloway's supposed to take the XR-1 up in the morning before dawn. Call me if Miss Johnson and her party go out to AiRockets, will you, Manny?"

"I'd thought of it," Manny taunted him. "They'll probably head out there before anyone else is due to show up. Maybe you'd better start on your beauty sleep!"

"Yeah. See you then."

ROURKE buttoned the house robot to dispose of the serving tray and peeled off his clothes as he wandered into the bedroom. He shaved and showered, blew himself dry with unscented air, set the bedside alarm

clock, and tumbled into the sheets. His Luger pistol resided cozily beneath his pillow.

The alarm was set for two-thirty. Its luminous hands pointed to one-forty-five when he awakened to the persistent, ringing chimes of the videophone. He pulled himself out of bed, Luger in hand, and padded barefoot into the living room.

Manny's rugged features splashed on the screen. "The five goons are sitting in their copter just outside the AiRocket grounds," he reported crisply. "The guard, Marty Williams, just came out to meet them."

"I'm on my way," Rourke yawned, and flicked off the screen.

He returned to the bedroom and dressed carefully. No padded jacket this time, but a loose, full-sleeved woolen blouse. No shoulder-holsters, but a long trench coat with spring-clip holsters in the baggy side pockets. He moved like a drab gray shadow through the wet morning fog, melted into his jetcopter, and lifted it on thrumming rotars. The Moon was a cold, bright disc in the black sky, and clumps of trees and buildings protruded blackly from the silvery blanket of ground fog below. He neutralized the controls and settled back, shoving the flop-brimmed gray hat back on his head and lighting a cigarette.

The job before him would probably be the most ticklish task he'd have to perform. The syndicate crooks must be allowed to break into the AiRocket plant and create a disturbance—yet they mustn't be allowed to do any serious damage! They had to be stopped before it became serious—but he couldn't expose himself to them!

There was too much chance that one of them might get away; and if that one should report Rourke as being something more than just an Ad-

vertising and Public Relations Manager, the syndicate would quickly make one accurate conclusion: that Rourke was a World Police Inspector. Thereafter, the trap so carefully laid to catch the syndicate would fail—and Rourke's life wouldn't be worth a plugged nickel!

But he had to stop them.

HE PLUMPED the copter down on its pudgy tires in the parking lot and used his passkey to enter AiRockets' Administration Building, moving down the dark corridors and up the elevators with the aid of a flashlight. He entered his private office, switched on the lights, and sprawled behind the desk.

The tough, beefy face of Captain Gaines of the plant guards flashed on the videophone screen in answer to Rourke's call. "Main Gate," Gaines reported gruffly.

"This is Rourke, Advertising and Public Relations—"

"I can see that on the call-board, Mr. Rourke," Gaines reminded him.

"Oh! Fine. Are there any rail shipments coming through the Main Gate this morning?"

"No, sir, it's very quiet this morning."

"Well, I was wondering if perhaps someone might try to slip through that way. We're testing the XR-1 this morning—"

"Yes, sir, the crew's over at the hangars now," Gaines was respectful, if dubious. "But nobody's tried to slip past here, sir."

Rourke grimaced impatiently. "Well—look, Gaines, we've been having some suspicious things happen lately. I wonder if you'd mind checking the guards at their posts?"

"Oh—not at all!" Gaines complied, but his tones were hardly enthusiastic.

"I wouldn't be surprised if there

was some trouble this morning, Gaines," Rourke prodded him.

"I'll call the guard-posts, sir."

"Fine. Let me know if anything happens. I'll be here in my office."

"Very well, sir. I'll call you if anything happens."

The screen blanked.

Rourke sighed wearily, snapped the videophone off, unlocked his desk, and took the book out of the bottom drawer. Then he settled down to wait....

Notable among the criminal activities of the various world crime syndicates are those activities which grew out of The War Years. The most predominant is smuggling and the black marketing of contraband goods, but this activity is generally conducted by small local groups of criminals very loosely organized into any world-wide order, and as such they are more a concern of local authorities than of the U.N. World Police.

Next on the list is narcotics, which is the activity of several known syndicates; following that comes slavery, the major activity in the Orient where prostitution is not frowned upon by social custom. One of the most insidious threats to the progress of mankind, however, is the activity of one particular syndicate about which little is known. This syndicate takes a page directly from the history of The War Years and peddles scientific secrets.

In our peaceful society of today, one would hardly suspect the existence of secret knowledge. During The War Years, it was understandable—the major powers each had their preciously guarded "military secrets" and scientific "hush-hush" projects. However, peaceful industry also has secrets: new processes, new developments, new products being prepared for the market. These secrets must be kept until they are in production and protected by International Patent laws.

It is the practice of the unknown syndicate to steal these industrial secrets and sell them illegally to the highest bidder. Unfortunately, not all industrial firms are honest; most of them do comply with local and international law, and are quite respectable in their businesses, since good business is largely good reputation and

trustworthy contacts. But there are inevitably a few "bad apples" in the lot. Those few are directly responsible for the success of this syndicate, and it is they who sanction its crimes of theft of industrial secrets, kidnapping and coercion, and even murder of scientists and other people connected with such secrets....

Rourke tossed the book down and snapped on the screen almost as soon as the videophone chimes began ringing.

Gaines' beefy visage flashed on, its brow furrowed in sudden concern. "Mr. Rourke, there does seem to be trouble of some sort—"

"Spill it, man!" Rourke barked at him.

"Well, I called the guard-posts and Martin Williams didn't answer," Gaines explained haltingly. "So I sent one of my relief men out to check on Williams. That was half an hour ago—"

"Where?"

"Over in the inertium gas plant. I'm on my way over there now, soon as I can get a squad together. Thought I'd call you and—"

"Get every man you have available," Rourke ordered crisply. "Sound the general alarm and alert all the other guard-posts to trouble in the inertium plant building. I'll notify the Atom Town Police. Got that?"

GAINES was livid with excitement. "You—you think it's that serious?"

"My guess is sabotage! Now, hop to it, Gaines—" Rourke cleared the screen and dialed the Police. He gave a terse account to the uniformed Desk Sergeant, snapped off, and made a bee-line out of his office for the air-field below.

The little field scooter was parked before the Control Tower as usual. He piled into it and swung it around,

heading back from the field toward the sprawling plant buildings. He skidded along the dark, narrow alleyways between the buildings, tore madly across a broad parkway, and was skimming toward the looming, glass-walled hulk of the inertium gas-processing plant when he spotted Gaines and a platoon of uniformed plant guards marching over from the Main Gate. Marching! Why the devil weren't they double-timing over here?

He slammed on the brakes and squealed up to the plant's entrance on protesting tires. Leaping from the scooter, he ran up the steps to the dark portals and threw his weight against them.

They were locked.

He didn't have a key. Gaines' platoon was still too far away, still coming at a disciplined walk. Cursing under his breath, Rourke stumbled back down the steps and piled into the scooter. Throwing the gears in reverse, he backed up and swung around facing the steps. Then he gunned the turbine and the scooter hurtled forward.

It bounded up the steps and exploded through the entrance with a splintering crash. *That'll bring Gaines running!* Rourke thought, fighting the wheel to keep the little vehicle from careening against the walls of the dark, inner corridor. He caught a dim blur of movement to his left, and rolled out the side of the scooter onto the floor just as an orange streak of flame lighted the corridor. The loud blast of the shot followed it, and the bullet slammed into the opposite wall.

The scooter rolled ahead and crashed into the end of the corridor. Rourke came to his knees with a Luger in his fist and fired.

A dark figure slammed back against the wall, then pitched forward on its face.

Rourke climbed to his feet, breathing heavily, and moved down the corridor to the open doorway to the plant interior. He peeked cautiously around the edge of the doorway, then slipped through and let the blackness engulf him.

There was a dim gray light filtering in through the outer glass walls, but his drab gray attire rendered him invisible in it. He pulled his hat low over the white blob of his face and balanced a Luger pistol in each gray-gloved hand.

From here on it would be touch-and-go.

THE PLANT interior was three stories high, crammed with the dark bulks of giant tanks and a webwork of pipes, girders, and catwalks. He slipped silently through it, searching, and found what he was after near the center of the room. A dim blue glow, trickling from between the huge tanks. The tanks, he saw, formed a circular barricade around the spot. He faded into a nearby tangle of vertical pipes, found the rungs of a metal ladder, and began climbing upward.

He came out on a narrow catwalk high up near the ceiling and proceeded along it over the steel tops of the tanks until he was directly above the center of the room. Looking down, he saw four dark-garbed men wearing black masks and a uniformed plant guard standing in the blue glow of a lamp, their backs to each other as they peered around the tanks. A faint murmur of voices came drifting up to him.

It was too late to worry about exposing himself now. The five men below were prepared to fight to the finish. Other men would be killed.

But if none of the five escaped...

He lay down on the catwalk and extended his arm over the edge, point-

ing a Luger downward. Then he waited, a plan forming hurriedly in his mind. The Luger he aimed downward hadn't been fired yet.

Gaines' men came bursting into the building with a chorus of rebel yells and the echoing thunder of running feet.

The five men below hunched down behind their steel barricade and commenced firing. Other shots instantly replied. Bullets screamed and ricocheted in the dark metal catacombs.

With cool deliberation, Rourke fired five times, taking precise aim for each shot. The Luger threw ejected empty cartridges tinkling into the darkness below.

The five men sprawled grotesquely, their guns silent.

CHAPTER III

THE SECRET OF AIROCKETS, INC.

IT WAS a simple matter to slip down unseen from the upper catwalks in the noisy furor that followed—and to melt into the shadow of a wall air-vent, peeling out of his gray trench coat. He stuffed trench coat, hat, gloves and one Luger deep inside the air-vent, then took the other Luger—the one which had been fired only once—and slipped back out to the corridor.

He was crouching behind the twisted wreck of the little scooter, gun in hand, when the police arrived. Coming from the Administration Building, they used the same entrance he did.

They grabbed his Luger, slapped him around, and had the handcuffs snapped on his wrists before Gaines and the plant guards could arrive to explain who he was. The Sky Troopers were still suspicious until Detective Lieutenant Ybarra arrived and con-

firmed Rourke's identity. That satisfied them and they relaxed, letting Rourke go. Then only Ybarra was suspicious.

He looked at the body of the relief man Gaines had sent to check on Williams, noting its crushed skull with academic curiosity. Then he looked at the bodies of the five gunmen, Williams included. After that, he listened patiently through all the wildly conflicting stories told by Gaines' men, and the counter-claims they made as to who had accounted for which of the gunmen.

Then he took Rourke outside with him, alone. They climbed into a Police copter standing before the plant building and Ybarra took the controls, lifting it into the sky. "We're going over to the hangars," he explained curtly. "Your boss, McWilliams, is there with the men preparing your experimental craft for its test flight."

Rourke slumped back in the cushions and lighted a cigarette. He blew smoke with a sigh of weariness, fully aware that Ybarra was watching him with narrowed interest.

"There is no family relationship between your boss McWilliams and this guard Williams who was working for the gunmen?" the suave Inspector asked suddenly.

Rourke looked honestly surprised. "None that I know of! Their names are just slightly familiar, that's all."

YBARRA nodded as if he had just learned something important. The police copter was creeping slowly over the plant buildings, taking its time about reaching the airfield.

"That was quite daring of you to go dashing over there with a gun in your hand," Ybarra commended gently. "And to smash the door down and shoot it out with one of them. You think they were hired to commit sabotage by Volks-Aero Industries, perhaps?"

"Who else?" Rourke protested. "After the threatening tone of that man, Czecmelowicz—" He noted with quiet satisfaction that the name didn't upset the Inspector.

"Mr. McWilliams told me about that," Ybarra admitted readily. "And, of course, after what happened at the Simakov home, you had definite reason to suspect something like this would happen."

"What I can't understand is how Volks-Aero expected to get away with it!" Rourke confessed worriedly.

"That's a good question," Ybarra agreed. "However, there's a more immediate question I would like to have answered." He turned his direct gaze on Rourke.

"What's that?"

"Do you have a permit for that gun?"

"As a matter of fact, I'm afraid I haven't." Rourke smiled lamely. "I kept it around the house, you see—"

"Yes." Ybarra's tone said he specifically did not see. "And then, how did you manage to kill the other five men? From the catwalk above? Each of them was shot from above, you know."

"Can you be sure of that?" Rourke spoke challengingly.

A faint smile quirked the corners of Ybarra's mouth. "No, I can't be sure. Men in a gun-battle sometimes assume weird positions. However, I shall have that Luger of yours examined by ballistics, and a bullet from it will be compared with the bullets which killed those five men."

Rourke felt like grinning, but kept a straight face. You'll have to find the other Luger to have the right gun, copper!

"Have you nothing to say?" Ybarra goaded him.

Rourke shrugged resignedly. "I suppose you know what you're doing," he replied.

Ybarra's dark face twisted in disgust.

"SEVEN men killed!" the Old Man exclaimed bitterly. "Rourke, it's not going to help our company to be stained with blood."

They were standing together in the flood of light that spilled from the opened door of the giant hangar. There was Professor Thornton Weigand, a tall, skinny scarecrow with a shining bald dome and thick-lens spectacles, and husky, freckle-faced Skid Halloway, and a half-dozen engineers in white work coveralls. Old Man McWilliams stood in the center of the group, conversing with Rourke and Inspector Ybarra.

"It's not our fault any blood was spilled," Rourke replied grimly. "We're just protecting our interests, Mac."

"Gaines just called from the Main Gate," McWilliams retorted. "There's a crowd of reporters out there! What're you going to tell them?"

"I'm not going to tell them anything!" Rourke said, then tapped him on the chest. "You're going to tell them!"

"But, man, you're the hero of this skirmish! You blew in on those gunmen and held them at bay—"

"That's a matter of opinion." Rourke grinned. "But it won't do for me to go out there and tell them what a hero I am! You tell them."

"But we're running off this flight test."

"We can hold it a few minutes, boss," Halloway said.

Rourke nodded. "A few minutes. Fine. Go talk to those reporters, Mac—just for a few minutes. Just long enough to tell briefly what a hero I am. Then say you have to get back here for the flight test."

McWilliams frowned perplexedly, then nodded. "All right. What have

you to say, Inspector Ybarra?"

"The case is closed, apparently," Ybarra replied. "The gunmen broke into your plant and your guards stopped them. We're taking out the bodies. However, I must ask Mr. Rourke not to take any sudden trips."

"Rourke?" McWilliams looked astonished.

"He was carrying a gun without a permit," Ybarra said, smiling. "Purely a piece of routine, Mr. McWilliams—we'll merely see that he gets one."

"Oh." The Old Man turned back to Rourke. "Any idea what the damage was to the plant?"

"Might've been some from the bullets—" Rourke caught himself; he had almost said *bouncing around in the works!* but remembered he wasn't supposed to have been inside the plant proper. Ybarra wouldn't have missed a slip-up like that, either!

McWilliams covered it up without the least knowledge that he did so. "Hang the bullets!" he exploded. "What'd those sneaky devils do to the plant?"

"I wouldn't know," Rourke answered truthfully. "Perhaps we should ask Doc Simakov to come over and see what damage was done."

"Simakov? Why?"

"Because that's what they might've been after at his home," Rourke said. "They might've been looking for information that would tell them how to sabotage the inertium plant."

Ybarra looked suddenly thoughtful. "You know, Rourke, there might be something in that! Suppose I went after Dr. Simakov?"

"Later, Inspector," McWilliams vetoed. "No need to wake the man up this early. Bring him around after breakfast though, will you?"

"Let's shake on that!" Ybarra stuck out his hand. "Can I give you a lift to the Main Gate in my copter, Mr. McWilliams?"

"If you will, yes!" The Old Man

shook hands with him, solemnly, then followed him out to the police copter.

Rourke stepped close to Skid Halloway. "If anybody wants me, I'll be in my office," he murmured.

Skid nodded.

Rourke borrowed another scooter from the hangar and drove off into the cool darkness. He shivered under his loose woolen blouse. Minutes later, he entered the Administration Building with a gray bundle under his arm. He carried it into his private office and stowed it in the file-drawer of his desk—all but the Luger, which he reloaded and tucked into his trousers' waistband under the loose blouse.

Then he placed a call to United Air Delivery Service and got Manny on the screen. "How're things with you?" Manny asked.

"Had to clobber the lot of them," Rourke replied. "Covered my tracks, but Ybarra's suspicious as hell."

Manny grinned. "I'll arrange to have a private talk with Ybarra. Don't worry about it. What's McWilliams doing about it?"

"He hasn't said, yet. But he'll probably fall for the game and place AiRockets under a tight security blanket."

"Volks-Aero gets the blame, huh?"

Rourke grinned at that. "I sort've suggested it myself."

"Good!" Manny gave an emphatic nod. "So long as they think we'll suspect Volks-Aero and not them, they'll think we're thrown off their trail—and they'll go ahead with this! I'll call you as soon as we get a line on anything."

"Right."

Rourke cleared the screen, noticed the seconds slipping past on the wall clock's face, and headed for the elevators in a run. He didn't want to miss Halloway's test flight!

THERE WERE three prototype models of the XR-I sitting in the

bright glare of the hangar lights. They were three fat, teardrop hulls squatting on the pudgy tires of their tricycle landing gear. Rourke paused in the shadows at the back of the hangar and watched the engineers swarm over the little craft, preparing them for flight.

Halloway would take one out for the test, and if it didn't check out he'd come back for another—and if it flunked out, he'd come back for the third. One out of three craft were favorable odds for providing a first-flight success. The faults in a ship that failed would be given careful study.

The ships had a sleek look in spite of their stubby proportions. Each fat hull was thirty feet long, with a blunt, pointed nose flaring back to a twelve-foot diameter at the center-section, then tapering toward the tail where the rocket nozzle was mounted between four sweptback control fins. Glass blisters were mounted over their cabins, high on the elephantine back of the hulls.

Those cabins were sealed off from the rest of the hull, Rourke knew. Each hull was actually no more than a rigid plastic shell. The engineers had the tail-sections removed from the hulls now, and were draping the limp sealite balloon bladders into them. The bladders were clamped fast to the glittering cylinders of the atomic rocket units being slowly rolled forward. This was the real secret of the airrockets, a thing Rourke understood only vaguely.

Simakov's synthetic inertium gas would freeze solid on an iron grid unless it were subjected to a temperature of thousands of degrees. Once subjected to such temperature, it became a stable gas—evaporating from the grid—having only a fraction of the mass of helium, with a proportionately larger "lifting capacity" per cubic foot.

Professor Weigand's atomic rocket unit used an atomic fuel without shedding any deadly radioactivity. It shielded its chain-reaction with "force-screens" built up between polar rods, and the emanations which escaped were far down in the infra-red band. The result was a concentrated point of thousands of degrees of heat. An iron grid had been mounted here, coated with Simakov's synthetic inertium solution. When the rocket began functioning, it "released" the inertium gas, which filled the bladder inside the hull and converted the ship into a lighter-than-air dirigible. The rocket delivered enough thrust, theoretically, to drive the ship at as much as five hundred miles per hour—or the nozzles could be opened, cutting down the thrust, and the ship could hover in midair.

There was no passenger discomfort from the rocket unit's tremendous heat production, since the inertium gas soaked the heat up quite efficiently. Refrigerating units took care of the difference.

Or so it said in the design specs.

It was Halloway's job to find out if it were true.

Halloway emerged from a locker room in the rear of the hangar and came over to join Rourke. He wore a heavy, refrigerated suit of flight armor and carried a crash helmet under his arm.

"Thanks for the tip-off on checking these crates," he said gruffly. "We found the refrigerating units jammed on all three of them."

"Did you tell Mac?" Rourke asked.

Skid nodded solemnly. "He didn't want to say anything in front of that police inspector, but we've got somebody right here in our research gang who's been selling us out. Nobody else would've known how to jam those refrigerating units!"

"How'd you spot them?"

"Ran a dye test—something we wouldn't have done normally." A wry grin creased Halloway's features. "Looks like it didn't do much good to risk our necks building that Luna Base—we still got wars, anyway!"

"We've cut down the casualties, at least," Rourke replied gravely. "Seven dead is a lot better than seven million dead."

Skid raised his brows, then sighed and nodded agreement. "I guess it is at that. Thanks anyway, Tom."

"Sure," Rourke said.

HALLOWAY'S luck was with him.

The first ship he chose passed the test successfully. They rolled it out on the field and he started up its rocket. It rested lightly on its tires as the gas expanded within its fat hull, then skittered forward gently as Skid applied slight thrust. He mastered its controls in a few minutes and soon had it skimming all over the field. Then he increased the thrust and lifted it easily into the calm, cool morning darkness.

The airocket had certain advantages not boasted by jetcopter. It had a speed range of from five to five hundred miles per hour; the jetcopter's range was only from five to one-twenty-five. The airocket's range was an estimated five thousand miles without refueling; jetcopters could fly only a thousand miles non-stop. And an airocket could be flown in any and all weather; jetcopters still had to avoid areas where icing conditions prevailed.

Halloway brought the bullet-like craft screaming over the field, threw it into a tight turn, and came drifting down as lightly as a feather, the landing gear folding outward from the sleek hull. He clambered down the steps into the crowd of cheering, white-coveredalled engineers. Airockets were here to stay!

Rourke walked back to the Administration Building, picked up the grey bundle in his office, and carried it out to his copter in the parking lot. He flew home and deposited the trenchcoat and hat in his wardrobe closet, changed clothes, and got out a spare Luger pistol to complete his usual armament. Then he joined the traffic patterns and windmilled into Atom Town for breakfast. Dawn was exploding its brilliant colors in the east.

He parked the copter on a roof and descended the elevator into a brightly lighted roboteria. He slid into a booth seat and a small metal monster rolled up on silent casters to accept his order. He gave it, then plunked change into the coin slot and had a morning paper plopped out to him from the wall panel.

The story had crowded even the news of the expedition on Mars from the front page. Headlines shouted in bold black type: **AIROCKETS STOP SABOTEURS**. There was even a fairly handsome photo of him, one he recognized as having been given to Miss Dorothea Finch, his secretary, after persistent requests for it. The write-up gave him credit for spearheading the plant guards' attack on the saboteurs, smashing in the plant doors with a scooter, and there was a somewhat heroic fiction about his facing the saboteurs' blazing guns single-handed until the guards arrived.

And then they went into the story of how he'd saved the lives of Doctor Simakov and his daughter from the same gang of killers. This, continued on the inside pages, sported a fetching glamour-photo of Miss Roberta Simakov—and directly across from her was an even more fetching photo of Miss Dorothea Finch in a tape sunsuit! Both were identified with broad implications in the solid-type captions

below the photos. Rourke pursed his lips and gave a long, low whistle. The robot brought his order and he settled down to breakfast.

A**I****R** **T****R****A****F****F****I****C** had begun to thicken with office people coming to work when he emerged on the roof landing again. He received several startled glances when he stopped at a newsstand and bought a copy of *Spaceways*, but managed to slip away and get off in his copter without attracting too much attention.

He returned to his office, sat down with the magazine, and proceeded to read it from cover to cover. It was the logical thing to do if he were to write an article on airockets for the magazine. He should know something about the general atmosphere of the stories and articles it featured.

Spaceways was a fairly good general slick magazine, though it specialized in the field of science-fiction. The articles were clear, concise and to the point, dealing more with what the subjects meant to the reader than with technical information on the subjects. The stories ranged all the way from satirical humor to psychological tragedy to a suspenseful adventure serial. The back pages of the magazine were healthfully loaded with full-color advertisements of wall television, jetcopters, electronic appliances and house robots, and world airline tourist attractions.

He was aboard the Space Admiral's flagship off Cygnus Major, watching that austere gentleman direct a battle fleet against the enemy *Ulthii* forces via telepathic commands, when the door opened and Miss Finch waltzed in. She swayed up to the desk, smiling, and laid a glossy photograph before him. It was an exact copy of the one featured in the morning papers, tape unsuit and all.

"I thought you might like it," she purred musically.

I**T** **W****A****S** three days before he heard from Manny again. Inspector Ybarra dropped by to return his Luger with a gun permit made out for it. McWilliams told him that company security was being tightened up, and uniformed plant guards checked him in and out of the parking lot every day. Doc Simakov came, inspected the inertium plant, and left AiRockets' engineers to clear up the minor damage. Halloway took the experimental ships up with increasing frequency, testing the bugs out of them for the flight engineers. Miss Finch whistled every time Rourke passed through the outer office. Her photograph won prominent display on his desk. A Cantonese interpreter in San Francisco gave him half-a-day's argument over the wording of an advertisement for a Chinese magazine.

Manny called on the afternoon of the third day. The cloud doctors of Weather Control had been up to their usual tricks and the rain was pouring down outside.

"I got news," Manny said.

"Oh, fine!" Rourke groaned. "I'm expected for dinner at the Simakovs' tonight!"

"Well, la-de-dah!" Manny snorted derisively. "Give the princess my love, your highness!"

"Okay, okay," Rourke protested. "Let's have it, slave-driver."

"We almost have the complete data on the syndicate," Manny said. His gaze was coldly impersonal.

Rourke let the words sink in, then leaned back and cupped his chin in his hand. "Let's hear it," he prompted.

"We caught the key factor as soon as the newspapers reported that fracas you had at AiRockets," Manny complied evenly. "Our boy Czecmelowicz left the Hotel Atometro looking unhappy. He met Betty Lou Johnson in a roboteria and they had a lengthy

conversation—"

He left the screen, then returned with a typed report sheet in his hand. "Our lip-reader says they wondered if you were a World Police Inspector. You've succeeded too well in wrecking their plans, it seems. Czecmeloweicz suspects you, but Miss Johnson doesn't—so Czecmeloweicz ordered her to check up on you personally.

"Then Czecmeloweicz sent off a cablegram to Budapest. We got the address and tipped off World Police Frankfurt. They took it from there, and now we know the boss of the syndicate is a man called Paulas Cretius—tall, slender build, silvery hair, immaculate in appearance, face deeply lined with ruddy complexion and deep-set, baggy blue-green eyes; six feet and a hundred and eighty pounds, from fifty to seventy years old with excellent health. This Cretius is on his way here via stratoliner right now!"

"**WE'VE** SMOKED out the boss-man, eh?" Rourke grinned.

"More than that," Manny replied emotionlessly. "Paulas Cretius cabled an address in Mexico City; World Police Havana checked on it. There's a gang of killers due in here tomorrow at noon. Cretius is going to give us a battle." He paused, laying the report sheet aside.

"But the weak link was Czecmeloweicz," he went on. "Frankfurt checked Budapest on him, finally traced him to Warsaw. The Czecmeloweicz family is in building construction there; they recognized this crook's photostat. Seems he worked for them once as a young man—his name was Jan Lipenchek then—and tried a little embezzlement. He served a nine-year prison term for that. Then his criminal record extends over most of Eastern Europe. We've tied him in with Paulas Cretius and, by checking what

little is known of their movements, we have a fair outline of the history of this syndicate."

"So Czecmeloweicz is Jan Lipenchek!" Rourke mused grimly. "He should've chosen a more untraceable name for his *nom de guerre*—like Schmidt!"

"We have the complete pattern of data to compute this, except for one factor," Manny said. "We haven't figured Betty Lou Johnson into this deal. We can't calibrate her."

"That shouldn't be too difficult."

"Oh, come now! You *are* young, aren't you? That little babe is probably the toughest nut in the whole outfit, sonny."

"What do Headquarters' Technicians say?" Rourke asked.

"They say we either take Miss Johnson out of circulation—and that'll tip Cretius off to us for sure!—or we let her go to work on you and lose a promising young Inspector." Manny was watching him critically. "It's up to you, Tom."

"Let 'er rip," Rourke said. "I'll see if I can't come out alive."

"If you're killed, that'll give us enough to calibrate Miss Johnson into the equation," Manny informed him cryptically. "If you aren't killed, bring us a calibration. Good hunting."

The screen went blank.

"**O**H, HELLO, Rourke!" Professor Weigand exclaimed, coming forward across the Simakovs' living room. "Didn't know you'd be here! This is an unexpected pleasure, young man!"

Rourke smiled and shook hands with the Professor as Robbie Simakov clung affectionately to his arm. "Mr. Rourke is my guest tonight, Professor Weigand!" she announced, grinning with mischief.

"Oh?" Weigand chuckled graciously. "Well, I must congratulate you upon your good taste, my dear. He

is a handsome devil!"

Rourke took their ribbing with a good-natured shrug and went on to greet Dr. Simakov. "Good to have you here, Rourke," the little gray-haired scientist welcomed him. "Drinks before dinner? Martini? I mix a special one!"

"I could do with a special one," Rourke accepted gladly.

They chatted over drinks for a while, Weigand giving them a general run-down on the successful test-flights of the airockets, and then entered the warm gloom of the dining room, where gold trim winked on rich mahogany panelling and silverware glittered brightly in the glow of tapered candles.

Conversation at dinner was led mostly by the two scientists with lean-faced Professor Weigand bobbing his shiny bald dome as he waxed enthusiastic about his airockets. They would never do for heavy shipping or freight transportation, he explained, because the power necessary for that was greater and costlier than the power used in the conventional atomic-turbine ocean liners and freighters. However, as a private passenger craft, the airocket's fast speed and five-thousand-mile range would promote more world travel than ever before.

Americans hadn't yet grown accustomed to taking a trip to Asia for a pleasant weekend, or the Asiatics to America! Few people would consider a trip to Europe merely an overnight business trip, done in one's own privately flown ship.

Airockets would make such things commonplace. The result would be to increase peoples' knowledge and understanding of each other, making for a more tolerant and good-humored world civilization. Rourke caught the trend in this direction and went off in a spiel about his world-wide adver-

tising campaign, and how widely ordinary business practices varied in different parts of the world; and how tough it was sometimes to understand these local ways of doing business and comply with them as prescribed by international law.

He immediately was trounced by two scientists who eagerly explained that the ways of conducting scientific research were the same, no matter where you were....

ROBIE came to his rescue and dragged him into the living room, leaving the two elderly men to their pipes and coffee and technological progress.

"When Father argues with you," she remarked, half-smiling, "it means you've won his unquestioning approval!"

"He should be more careful!" Rourke taunted her. "I have a few secrets which might seem highly unquestionable!"

She laughed appreciatively, pulling him across the room to the couch. "I'm not sure I could resent that," she murmured, as they sat down beside each other. "But then, I'm not sure I understand what you meant by it, either!"

Rourke stared into the glowing crystals of the electronic fireplace. "I'd be glad to discuss that," he said. "But it happens they're right in the next room and might be coming in here any minute!" He stifled an after-dinner yawn behind his hand.

"Well!" Robbie sat back and smiled. She was wearing a rich crimson gown of synthetic material that molded like film to her firm body.

Rourke felt butterflies cruising inside him. "Are you always this beautiful?"

"Uh-uh!" She shook her head impishly. "Only on special occasions. Like, for instance, when a man is

around." She leaned forward and picked a cigarette from the silver tray on the low glass-topped table. "Were you ever married, Tom?"

He held the table lighter aflame for her. "Not that I recall," he answered musingly. "Have you?"

She looked up at him, then blew a smoke-ring that encircled his nose. "No, I haven't. It's never been the right person, has it?"

"For one reason or another, no—it never has." He set the lighter on the table, then settled back beside her and put his arm around her. She snuggled in closer, resting against him.

"Tell me about yourself," she murmured.

Rourke gazed at the fireplace glow. Bright crystals, activated to a flaming glow of heat by electronic current.

"Well?" she prompted.

"I... was born in Singapore," he began haltingly. "I grew up in the Canadian Northwest—my father was an engineer in foreign employment. I studied at the University of Brazil, lived like a starving rat in the slums of Paris, became lieutenant of a band of Arab bandits, was carried half-dead of thirst off the Gobi Desert—"

"Oh, all right!" She pulled away from him, indignantly. "I didn't think that newspaper publicity would go to your head!"

"But it's true!" he protested.

"Shall we see what's on television?" She rose and stalked across the room. "I'll dial Channel Thirteen!"

HE WAS flying his copter homeward when he reached under the seat and took his guns and shoulder-holsters from a small compartment. He slipped out of his jacket and buckled the guns on.

The videophone chimed softly.

He struggled back into his jacket, hurriedly, and pulled the screen mount up over his lap. The screen flashed

onto the moonlit interior of another copter and a tall, blonde girl who smiled at him. "You're Tom Rourke, aren't you!" she exclaimed.

"That's right," he admitted.

"Thought I recognized you as you flew past me a moment ago. I'm just above and behind you now." Her voice was grave and sweet. "Sorry to bother you this way, but they say you're a brave man, Mr. Rourke. And I'm in trouble—"

"What sort of trouble?"

"I'm mixed up with the gang that tried to sabotage your company several nights ago," she replied frankly. "I'm afraid they're trying to kill me, Mr. Rourke."

"Give me your name," Rourke said.

"Betty Lou Johnson."

"All right, Miss Johnson. Why aren't you going to the police?"

"Prison would be preferable to dying," she retorted. "But I don't want to go to prison either, if I can help it. I'd rather come to you."

Her copter was moving alongside his now. Rourke gazed out at it, with its blue nightlight glowing atop the teardrop hull and its whirling rotors shimmering in the moonlight. They glided along smoothly over the black earth where the warm lights of homes were scattered coals of some giant's fire. Thunderclouds hovered ahead and to the right, with blurred sheets of rain descending from them. A bright tongue of lightning flickered near the horizon.

She started out with a lie! Rourke thought. He'd passed no other copters in the traffic patterns since leaving the Simakov home! So that meant he had been watched, and she'd been informed when he left and which direction he flew—she'd have had to know, to intercept him. That meant a dark figure lurking out beyond the clumps of cactus, watching the Simakov home,

plotting the course of his copter as he flew away from it.

Miss Johnson had not fallen out with her gang.

"All right, Miss Johnson. I'm willing to talk to you. Suppose you lead the way?"

"There's a place near the spaceport where we can talk," she said, easing her copter ahead of his to lead him there....

THE NEVADA spaceport was a broad expanse of flat, level field ten miles south of Atom Town. Its edge was lined with giant, hangar-like buildings and terraced rows of workshops, laboratories, factories and warehouses. The whole establishment was fenced off and guarded by uniformed troopers of the United Nations Armed Forces.

Beyond the fence was a wild collection of hotels, restaurants, bars, and ramshackle plastiform houses, with field scooters scurrying about on the dirt streets. Garish neon lights flickered dimly through a dark curtain of rain as Betty Lou Johnson swooped her copter low over the settlement. She settled down on a small parking roof and Rourke jockeyed his ship into the narrow space left behind her. A brilliant red sign flashed on and off, wetly proclaiming SPACEPORT MOTEL to the rain-drenched night.

Rourke unzipped his jacket and unfastened the holster from beneath his right armpit, quickly storing it in the little compartment beneath the seat. Then he zipped up his jacket and climbed out into the soaking downpour. Betty Lou came tripping back from her ship to join him, her blonde hair plastered down over her forehead.

"Come on!" she yelled. "This way!"

They ran through the rain to the doorway of an elevator shaft. She huddled against him in the small chamber,

her short dress clinging wetly to her skin, and pressed the main floor button. "We'll go to my apartment and talk," she said, as the elevator descended. "You don't mind, do you?"

"Not when you stand this close," he replied softly.

She looked up at him, then turned and slid a caressing hand over his chest. Then she scowled at him. "You've got a gun!"

"The police gave me a permit for one." He pulled out his billfold and showed her the permit.

They left the elevator and strode along covered walks past a row of dark, rain-shrouded bungalows until she turned in to one and slid a key into the lock. She led him inside and snapped on the light, revealing a small, cozy bedroom-living room. She closed the door behind him and locked it, then came up to him and slipped her arms around his neck.

"I don't mind the gun," she murmured against his lips. "I want you to help me, so I'm going to be nice to you." The kiss was long, full-lipped, and clinging.

He had been neatly maneuvered so he was facing the closet door across the room. The door was opened a crack and the toe of a foot was visible in the blackness beyond it. The toe of a man's boot, large size.

She released him and stepped back, her firm breasts heaving against the taut, wet dress as she regained her breath. She smiled bewitchingly, then slowly followed his stare down at herself.

"Sit down," she said softly. "I'll get undressed."

Rourke moved over to the one comfortable chair in the room and sat down. She swayed past him, her hand gliding over his cheek in a damp caress. The whispery sounds of wet cloth came from behind him,

Then the closet door exploded inward. Two men piled out, cursing. One was as big as an Indian wrestler. The other held a gun.

CHAPTER IV

THE CRIME MACHINE

IT WAS quite a spectacle when the two Sky Troopers burst through the front door and came charging into the room, guns drawn.

Rourke was flattened across the bed, his clothes torn, and his face beaten to the consistency of raw hamburger.

The skinny little runt with the wizened face was cowering in the corner, clutching his shattered right arm. A bullet from Rourke's Luger had done that. His shiny, nickel-plated revolver was lost somewhere in the general wreckage of the room.

A huge, gorilla-like figure was sprawled on its face in the middle of the floor. There were six neat bullet holes in its back, also contributed by Rourke's Luger—though he hadn't been holding it at the time. The giant bruiser had reached him before he could fire.

The Luger itself lay on the floor next to the bed. Just over it, and on the bed, sat Betty Lou Johnson. She was on her knees and had Rourke's head pillowed on her lap. She was wiping at his face with a wet dress, and the tears were pouring down her cheeks and splashing on him. She was stark naked, her shoulders twitching as harsh sobs tore at her throat.

"You're just a nice guy!" she was saying, over and over. "*You're just a nice guy!*"

The cops left them alone. One picked up the Luger and another went to call Police headquarters in Atom Town.

News photographers and telecast

cameramen were crowded around outside when Rourke was carried out. Betty Lou followed, bundled in a policeman's raincoat.

Then Rourke was alone, lying on a stretcher inside a police ambulance copter. He wondered why it didn't take off.

Then a white-uniformed, attractive nurse was slipping into the seat beside him, and a taller, darker form climbed in behind her. It bent over, and Ybarra's hard, dark features floated above him.

"How do you feel, Rourke?"

Rourke moved his puffed lips and winced at a stab of pain.

"Not like talking, eh? I don't blame you. Nice girls you shack up with, fella—only this one had a wrestler for a boyfriend!"

IT WAS all over the newspapers. The story was exactly as Ybarra had framed it, with added references to the broad, romantic implications the newspapers had voiced earlier. One paper daringly placed three photographs together—Robbie Simakov's glamour photo, Dorothea Finch's cheesecake photo, and a shot of the naked Miss Betty Lou Johnson with a policeman's raincoat pulled around her.

Rourke was definitely the Gay Lothario.

He was propped up in the hospital bed reading a dog-eared copy of *Spaceways* when Miss Finch visited him.

"Are you all right?" she asked, standing beside the bed.

"I'm fine," he said. "How are things at the office?"

"We'll manage." She was twisting a tiny handkerchief to shreds. "The papers say you'll be tried for shooting that man."

"In self-defense." He nodded stiff-

ly. "The district attorney assured me yesterday that it will merely be a formality. I won't even have to appear in court."

"That girl—"

"She'll have to appear for killing that other fellow, but they tell me she'll get only a light sentence."

He was allowed to go home a week later. He was delivered to his doorstep in a police copter and escorted into his own living room by Detective Lieutenant Ybarra.

Manny was sitting in the chair next to the television set. "Hail the conquering hero," he greeted sarcastically. "You broke the camel's back for us, son. Little Betty Lou poured her heart out to Lieutenant Ybarra here, who naturally told it to us."

"My men rounded up that gang of Mexican killers and shipped them back to Mexico," Ybarra added, helping Rourke into a chair.

Rourke looked up at him. "So that's why nothing's happened! You pulled Cretius' muscle-boys out from under him!"

Manny nodded affirmatively. "Looks like it's up to Cretius and his pal Lipenchek to pull this job alone now—unless they put it off until more help can arrive. Their other gangs are all in Europe though."

"You're watching them, aren't you?"

"Not after little Betty Lou spilled the beans!" Manny gave him a wry grin. "They knew she'd talked as soon as Ybarra's men closed in on their Mexican gang. Those two vanished like puffs of smoke when that happened."

Rourke grunted. He knew that no one could keep watching a skillful crook who didn't want to be watched; there were too many ingenious ways to shake a follower and fade into the crowd. "But we've computed all the

factors in this case now, haven't we?" he asked.

"Everything," Manny agreed.

"Have Headquarters' Technicians passed on it for the brain?"

"The brain can take it," Manny confirmed. "And it's time we used the brain. I've got your wall television rigged up here for it." He looked meaningfully at Ybarra. "You'll have to leave us, Lieutenant. Regulations, you know."

Ybarra bared his teeth in a smile and strode quietly out.

CRIME was an equation.

When the equation was complete, the sum of its factor described the negative force of evil in human society with the cold logic of mathematical accuracy.

Mathematically, the one way to cancel out a negative force was to oppose it with an equal positive force. So you drew up your equation for crime, added an equal sign, and drew a question mark on the other side of the equal sign.

Negative crime equals positive what? Find the answer, and crime can be cancelled out.

Manny put a sealed-beam call through to the United Nations Center in New York. There, in a subterranean room with banks of winking signal-lights covering the walls, a staff of white-coated Technicians went into action. Manny watched them on the wall screen in Rourke's living room, shuffling a pile of report sheets on his lap and comparing data with the Chief Technician.

Beyond the walls of blinking lights, buried deep in the solid rock of Manhattan Island, a giant electronic computer hummed and chicked and chattered, snicking relays and flashing tubes as the data were fed into it.

All the factors of the equation were

coded to the computer's language. The case histories of Paulas Cretius and Jan Lipenchek, alias Czecmelowicz; the vague knowledge of all the past activities of their world crime syndicate; the known crimes which had been committed, circumstantially attributable to this syndicate. They included the computer's previous answer—that AiRockets, Inc., would be a victim of the syndicate—and a complete resume of what had happened from the day Rourke joined AiRockets up to the present moment. And then they threw in the equal sign.

Negative crime equals positive what?

And they waited. The day was past by then, and evening shadows were lengthening under the trees beyond the living room's transparent outer wall. Rourke had his house robot rustle them up some food.

The brain solved it. Analyzing, scrutinizing, weighing in balance, it came up with an answer. The brain could do it—had done it for years. Crime was the one form of human endeavor capable of being broken down into logical components. The human mind was incredibly complex, far beyond the abilities of a man-made machine to compute; but human habit-patterns fell into a definite category that characterized Man as an animal. And crime was a habit. Crooks habitually frequented the same haunts, used the same aliases, retained the same methods in their work throughout their lives, even though those habits repeatedly led to their apprehension by the police. The brain could compute crime. So it gave them an answer.

And the answer was completely useless.

"The leader of the world crime syndicate in question," said the Chief Technician, reading from the spool-

tape just torn from the computer's slot, "is World Police Inspector Thomas Rourke!"

ROURKE? They were all staring at him—the men on the screen and Manny seated beside him. There was a glint of amusement in their eyes.

"Run it through again," Manny said.

"We'll get the same answer," the Chief Technician protested.

"Wait!" Rourke spoke calmly. "We'll take our equation a step further. Include this factor: I deny that I'm the leader of the world crime syndicate."

The Chief Technician nodded. "We'll include that factor, Inspector."

They ran it through again. The brain chattered and clucked and flashed lights and flickered tubes. They waited. The shadows outside deepened into twilight. The courses of a half-dozen stars across the Universe would have been easier to compute than the problem the brain was solving.

Then an alarm gong clangored and the spool-tape spewed from the slot.

The Chief Technician picked it up and translated its cryptic markings.

"Data are insufficient," he said.

"But that's impossible!" Manny jumped to his feet angrily. "We've dug out every single factor concerning this case—"

"Then the brain wouldn't give us this answer!" the Chief Technician reproved him. "After all, Inspector, the brain is designed—"

"I know, I know!" Manny waved him down. "And it's no smarter than the men who run it: I don't mean you, either—I mean me! I'm the one who collected those data."

"Then there's just one solution," the Chief Technician advised him. "You'll have to wait for some further development in your case and present

it again, with that development included."

"Suppose we do that now?" Rourke asked.

Manny whirled to him. "What's on your mind, Tom?"

"The way it accused me of being the leader of the syndicate," Rourke admitted honestly. "I'm wondering how it reached that conclusion."

"We could check back through it and give you the answer in about forty years!" the Chief Technician answered, grinning.

Rourke shook his head. "No, I don't mean how the brain got it. I'm wondering what factors *lead* to it, the factors that *we stuck into the brain!*"

"You mean it's something we have right at our fingertips? Something we should've seen and included in the equation?" Manny queried.

"That's exactly what I mean. Now, if I were the leader of the syndicate, what would I be doing now?"

Manny peered at him narrowly. "You'd be wondering how you could make contact with Cretius and Lipenchek to get this job done!"

"I'd probably have taken care of that before I left the hospital, wouldn't I?"

"Probably."

"Then right now I'd be planning where to strike next," Rourke continued. "And where would I strike? Why, where AiRockets, Incorporated keep the technical data on their secret, the inertium gas and atomic rocket unit!"

Manny nodded and licked his lips. "All right. Where do they keep it?"

"I don't know," Rourke confessed. "But old man McWilliams knows, and so does Professor Weigand. So suppose I asked them?"

"You'd need a reason for asking, wouldn't you?"

"I've been risking my neck for that

company, haven't I? What more reason would I need? Say I'm curious about this thing I've been protecting so heroically. I'd like to see the blueprints on it and have Prof. Weigand explain them to me!"

"So you'd call Weigand!" Maunty concluded.

"So I'll *call* Weigand." Rourke climbed stiffly out of his chair and crossed the room to the videophone.

THE FIRST words Professor Thornton Weigand uttered as his image flashed on the screen sent a shock tingling down to the base of Rourke's spine.

"Why, hello there, Tom!" he exclaimed jovially. "I've been expecting you to drop in any minute now!"

"Drop in?" Rourke echoed faintly. "Prof—who told you I was going to drop in?"

"Why, your secretary, Miss Finch! She told me all about your detective work with Lieutenant Ybarra and the Police in rounding up that gang of Mexican saboteurs!" Weigand chuckled wryly. "Quite a trick, getting that Johnson girl to side with you against the crooks. I'd like to hear about it—"

"Miss Finch gave you all the details, eh?"

"Why—why, yes. Shouldn't she?" Weigand was taken aback. "Sorry—I mean, if those newspaper stories were to hide anything—you haven't told Miss Simakov, have you? She's rather upset!"

"I'll call her—"

"Let me do that." Weigand smiled. "You come on over—I have the blueprints here to show you."

"I'll be there, and... Weigand?"

"Yes?"

"Be careful. You're in more danger now than you ever were!" Rourke flicked off the screen and hurried back to Manny.

"I heard it, Tom," Manny said. "We'll enter Miss Finch in on the computation. If they get the blueprints from Weigand, this is strictly our case—you know that, don't you?"

Rourke nodded, limping toward the door. "Call my copter when the brain has its answer," he said, then stepped into the foyer. Opening a small wall panel, he took out a holstered .50-caliber Browning machine-pistol and buckled it on—strictly heavy artillery. But the time had come for it. He limped out of the house and hauled himself into his jetcopter, then sent it hurtling up into the night.

The little copter poised in the black night on thrumming rotars. It was one of those calm, chilly nights without a moon, when the sky seemed a deep shadow filled with the twinkling motes of stars and the ground below was a vague blackness with the warm sparks of house-lights scattered thinly over it.

ROURKE remembered that Professor Weigand had a small home southeast of Atom City, and headed his copter that way while unfolding the videophone screen. He called AiRockets and got Gaines, on duty at the Main Gate, to look up the Professor's exact address for him. Gaines had it for him in forty seconds. Rourke switched off the screen and folded the videophone back into its niche, then slowed his speed and studied the black earth below, picking out the bright red traffic-lane arrows. He read his position from their numbers, checked his panel map, and corrected his course.

It took him down along the outskirts of the spaceport. He muttered a curse as red-green blinker lights warned him to detour away from the spaceport field. He swerved farther east and gazed out to the right toward the glow of floodlights that marked

the field. The tall, shimmering needle of an S-90 Earth-Moon supply ship stood poised on its tail-fins in the center of the field, preparing for take-off.

Weigand's home was nestled on the slope of a low line of hills to the east of the spaceport. Rourke set his copter neatly onto the landing ramp beside the dark house and unfastened the flap on his holster as he strode across to the portico entrance. If Weigand were waiting for him, why was the house in darkness?

He stepped into the deep shadow of the portico and felt along the wall for the doorbell. A faint sound behind him snapped his nerves tense, and he started to whirl—

A hard object grazed the back of his head and slammed into the base of his neck. Pinwheels of pain exploded in his mind and the floor came up to flatten his face.

He heard dim footsteps fading into the darkness in a stumbling run.

It had been a downward blow. If it had been swung squarely against his neck, the blow would have broken his neck!

But someone had swung at his head. And missed.

He began to feel the cold floor pressing against him. The fall had broken open a few scabs on his face; he could feel the trickle of blood. He was anxiously aware that only a few seconds had passed.

He rolled to his hands and knees and lunged out from the portico, clawing the heavy, compact Browning machine-pistol from its holster.

He saw his assailant, then, running with a stooped stagger across the landing ramp. Heading for his copter, Rourke could see that the man was tall and slender, with silvery hair, and a gun glinted in his hand. He was

running stooped over, with an arm clamped around his middle.

"Hold it, Cretius!" Rourke yelled.

Paulas Cretius skidded to a halt. He turned, weaving on his feet, and lifted his gun. Its muzzle winked flame and its sharp bark echoed into the darkness. The bullet smacked the wall behind Rourke and squee-e-ed off to the right.

ROURKE brought up his Browning and squeezed the trigger. The bulky gun bucked and roared yammeringly in his fist, spitting orange tongues of flame against the night. Ejected cartridges tinkled musically at his feet.

Cretius was hurled backward by the impact of the burst. His upper body folded over as if there were a hinge in his chest, then he smacked the ramp, skidding, and sprawled lifeless.

Rourke walked slowly out to him and stood over him, then knelt down beside him. The man's eyes were wide open, glistening in the starlight. Blood spurted from his mouth as his lips worked, trying to form words. Finally, the words were coughed out.

"Trixie Finch—double-crossed—"

Rourke reached out and grasped the arm clamped over Cretius' stomach, ignoring the now-dead eyes and the gory mass of the chest. He tugged at the frozen arm, prying it away from the dead man's middle. He gazed for a long moment at the small, neat hole that had been covered by the arm. It was a small-caliber hole.

Someone else had shot Cretius in the stomach.

Trixie Finch! Double-crossed.

"Trixie" Finch—Miss Dorothea Finch. Rourke released the stiff, cramped arm and rose. His neck was numb.

Then he walked back to the portico entrance. No need to bother with the

doorbell now; he pushed against the front door and swung it open, stepping into the pitch blackness within.

He felt his way cautiously across the foyer, fumbled along the wall with his fingertips until he found the doorway into the living room, then slipped through and stopped cold.

It was a broad, spacious living room, with a transparent outer wall that curved gracefully around to give a full view of the wide valley and the distant spaceport field, where the tall needle of the Earth-Moon supply ship gleamed in the glow of floodlights.

As Rourke slipped through the door, his attention was immediately caught by that scene. The field floodlights had gone out.

The next instant, a blinding white blaze exploded beneath the Earth-Moon ship's tail. It heaved itself up from the field and went climbing up into the night sky, a pillar of dazzling fire pouring from its rockets.

The bright reflection of that fire illuminated the broad living room. It revealed the twisted figure lying beside an overturned chair. It showed Rourke, in that brief instant, that the shiny bald head had been shattered like a ripe melon.

Then the illumination flickered and died. The S-90 supply ship was gone into outer space.

A faint, echoing blowtorch roar came drifting through the night.

Rourke strode over to the wall-switch and flipped on the lights.

THERE WAS a wide folding-table set in the middle of the living room. The table's surface was conspicuously bare.

Cretius and "Trixie" Finch—and possibly Jan Lipenchek—had been here. Miss Finch had managed to get them in without arousing Professor

Weigand's suspicions. Then Weigand had been murdered. The blueprint designs of the airocket were swept off the folding-table and folded up to be taken out to a waiting copter.

But two's company, perhaps, and three's a crowd. Now that they had the airocket secret, somebody decided they didn't have to deal Paulas Cretius in on it. So they dealt him out—with a bullet in his stomach—and left him behind....

It was possible that "Trixie" Finch thought more of Lipenchek than she did of Cretius. Cretius had been an elderly man. An attractive young girl could get bored with an elderly man after living with him for a while. Miss Finch probably lived with him in Europe before she came to join AiRockets, Inc., as a secretary.

This deduction was very probably true, Rourke knew.

Then he was whirling across the room to flatten against the wall, his Browning held ready.

Light, swift footsteps came tripping through the outer foyer.

Miss Roberta Simakov ran into the room, her features pallid with shock. She froze in her tracks and gave a sharp gasp as she saw Weigand's body.

Rourke breathed a sigh of relief, sagging back against the wall. The faint sound made her whirl like a suddenly released spring. She stared at him, wide-eyed and expressionless, her mouth gaping open. She saw the ugly bulk of the Browning machine-pistol in his hand.

Then she screamed. And screamed. Backing away from him in terror!

Rourke jammed the Browning into its holster and strode across the room. He slapped her hard, first with one hand, then the other. She collapsed into his arms in a dead faint.

Rourke picked her up and carried her out of the house, his blood-streaked face set in a grim mask. He carried her over to his jetcopter and shoved her into the seat, then crawled in beside her and lifted the little craft into the dark sky. The cold night wind came sweeping in through the panels, which he had left open deliberately, and Roberta stirred feebly against him. He pushed her over into the corner of the seat and was rewarded by a fearful intake of breath as she regained consciousness. She stared at him in wide-eyed fright.

"Why—why did you do it, Tom?" The words slurred through her twisted lips. "That—woman! And now murder!"

"Shut up!" Rourke ordered gruffly. He ignored her, setting the controls and pulling the videophone up over his lap. The call-chimes were ringing faintly. He flipped on the screen.

"Tom, you all right?" Manny's face was taut with concern. "I've been trying to get you for the past five minutes!"

ROURKE winced as the copter wallowed through an air pocket. He fought down the nausea in his stomach. His head felt like a balloon with the dull pain throbbing up from his neck. "I've been busy," he said, then related what had happened in terse, clipped phrases.

Manny nodded. "You'd better get over to AiRockets, Incorporated. We've got the answer—"

"What about Miss Simakov?"

"Ask her why she was there."

Rourke turned to her. She was gazing at the tiny screen in puzzlement. "Why did you come over to Weigand's tonight?" he asked her.

Her eyes flicked up to his face. "I—Professor Weigand called me, asked

me to come over. He said he had something to tell me—about you!" She spat the word with scornful disgust.

"He wanted to tell you I was working with the police," Rourke explained drily. He turned back to the screen. "I'll take her with me to the company. But why AiRockets?"

"According to the brain, that's where they're headed—if they haven't already arrived there! I've alerted the plant guards out there." Manny left the screen and returned holding a sheet of note-paper. "Here's the answer the brain gave us, after we included your secretary in the equation:

"Miss Dorothea Finch has been taking calls regularly from Jan Lipenchek, alias Czecmelowicz. World Police agents watching Lipenchek were not suspicious because it was assumed Lipenchek would call AiRockets from time to time, trying to persuade the company to accept the fake offer from Volks-Aero. Lipenchek always called Miss Finch at the company; she took the calls without Rourke's knowledge.

"Her purpose inside the company was to find the location of the blueprint designs for the airocket, and to inform Lipenchek on what success he had in diverting suspicion to the Volks-Aero firm.

"She failed to locate the blueprints. Her boss, Rourke, had broken up the gang's attacks on Dr. Simakov and the company's inertium gas plant; she began to suspect that Rourke was a World Police Inspector and that he knew her true identity as well. Through Lipenchek, she had Miss Betty Lou Johnson approach Rourke and try to expose him. Sure that she was right, she personally contacted other members of the gang and had them catch Rourke with Miss Johnson and beat him to death. Rourke played innocent, even refusing to use

his judo training in the resulting fistfight until it was almost too late. But Miss Johnson was convinced he wasn't a cop, and rescued him. Miss Finch had also been planning to double-cross Paulas Cretius and had persuaded Jan Lipenchek to help her. Using her position as Rourke's secretary, she will arrange with Prof. Weigand to have the airocket plans at his home, ostensibly to show them to Rourke—"

Manny broke off. "The brain went on to predict just about what happened out there, as far as the crooks are concerned. Then it wraps the case up with this: 'Miss Finch and Lipenchek will attempt to steal an airocket from the company and fly it to Mexico. With the experimental airocket and the plans, they can get other engineers to build airockets illegally, which they will sell through the syndicate to other criminal groups for inflated prices. The airockets' superiority over conventional police jetcopters will be used to the advantage of crime.'"

"In short," Rourke concluded, "we can nail them there!"

"If we're in time," Manny said glumly.

ROURKE sent his little copter windmilling through the darkness, detouring in a wide circle around the slender, glowing fingers of the commercial towers of Atom Town. Robbie Simakov sat silently beside him, huddled deep in her own thoughts and reflections.

"You're with the World Police then," was all she said.

The black earth rolled past below, with its sprinkled carpet of warm, friendly sparks where homes nestled snugly in the folds of night. Rourke, exhausted, kept his mind on his flying, watching the pattern of beacon lights below, cursing mentally

at the aching throb in his skull.

Copters were clustered in the glow of light flooding from the open doors of one of the big hangars as Rourke swept low over the company field. He swung his copter around and came in fast, making a speed landing that sent them rolling up to the other copters. His gaze swept over the crowd as he slipped out of his ship and limped forward. Plant guards were there, and Sky Troopers, and Lieutenant Ybarra was interviewing Skid Halloway in the midst of the crowd. Halloway was stripped to the waist and a Police medico was bandaging a bullet wound in his right shoulder.

Rourke started as a hand grasped his arm, turned, and stared into the grim, hard features of Ralph Henderson McWilliams. "Oh—hi, Mac," he greeted. "When did you get here?"

"Just now," McWilliams growled. "They dragged me outta bed when this shindig blew off. You look kinda beat-up yourself, boy."

"I was at Weigand's," Rourke told him. "They killed him, took the plans to the airocket. What happened here?"

"The girl and Czemelowiecz dropped in just as Skid was about to take one of the airockets up for a test," Mac explained curtly. "You able to travel, boy?"

Rourke raised his brows. "I got this far!"

"Then come on— I might need you!"

McWilliams pulled him around the crowd and into the lighted hangar. The other two airockets were ignored in the excitement. Mac jerked open the door on one and pushed Rourke through it, following and hustling him on into the cabin high on the broad back of the hull. "Buckle your seat straps," he warned breathlessly. "This is going to be a rough ride!"

Rourke started to protest. "See here, shouldn't Halloway—"

"All that kid knows is how to run a spaceship to the Moon!" Mac snapped acidly. "I may have a tin leg, but I've forgot more about aerial fighting than this whole bunch put together. Buckle your straps!"

THE CROWD turned startled faces toward the rocket craft as Mac flipped on the power, then scattered wildly as the airocket nosed its way out of the hangar. Mac cut in the ship's radio, leaving the videophone screen blank. "Charley X to Control Tower. Request immediate take-off clearance, Runway Six," he barked.

"Tower to Charley X. Identify yourself, over."

"This is McWilliams! Snap to it, tower— I'm taking off!"

The airocket went hurtling up in a steep climb.

"I'd have taken the old turboprop ship," Mac remarked casually, "only it'd taken too long to fuel her up. I figure they headed straight for Mexico; what do you think?"

"Mexico," Rourke gasped, the acceleration shoving him back into the cushions. Pain lanced through his taped chest.

Mac nodded solemnly and dumped the nose. The airocket levelled off and went into a straining turn, then settled into a headlong flight. "Suppose you get on the videophone now," Mac suggested, "and use some of that smooth salesmanship of yours to get us a U.N. Armed Forces patrol fighter up here?"

Rourke's eyes widened. "You think we can catch them?"

"I got a hunch I know more about using tail-winds than that crook does." Mac grinned mirthlessly. "We'll catch up with them—then we'll bring that patrol fighter down to clobber them."

Rourke got onto the videophone, dialing furiously.

Manny's face splashed on the screen. "Tom! Did you get them?"

"Too late," Rourke spoke brusquely. "Manny, get this through Headquarters to the U. N. Armed Forces Base at San Antonio. We need a patrol fighter in a hurry—our course is straight south from Atom Town toward Mexico. McWilliams and I are chasing them; we're both in airockets—"

"Have that fighter-pilot contact us!" Mac interjected.

"Got that!" Manny acknowledged. "There'll be a fighter up there inside twenty minutes!"

CHAPTER V

FIRE CONTROL!

"**YOU KNOW**, I sometimes wonder about you, Rourke," Mac drawled laconically. "Getting a rise out of them yet?"

"They won't answer," Rourke answered in disgust, switching off the videophone.

"Well, if they won't listen, we can't tell them anything—" Mac turned his head and stared out through the transparent blister. His gnarled hands gripped the controls with caressing tenderness akin to pure affection. The airocket swerved gently through the night.

The blue jet-flame of the other airocket was sharply visible against the black earth below. Mac kept one eye on it and the other on the dials and gauges of the chrome-trimmed instrument bank before him. They were boring steadily into the darkness with only a faint hissing sound of jets from the rear of the ship and a gentle, wallowing motion when it cut through some atmospheric turbulence. Rourke tried the videophone again.

"World Police to Lipenchek in experimental airocket! Come in if you hear me, Lipenchek. We have a patrol fighter on the way. You haven't a chance unless you surrender! Come in, Lipenchek—"

There was no response.

"Least they aren't taking any evasive action," Mac commented. "That guy's just high-tailing it as fast as he can go. Probably never got his feet off the ground until they stopped making automobiles!" The Old Man sighed and poked a cigarette between his lips. "This is the way it always ends up, isn't it! Whether they're fancy-pants dictators with a nation of fanatics to do their dirty work, or just plain filthy crooks with the law on their trail—"

"Yeah," Rourke said. He stared bitterly at the blank videophone screen. "This is how it ends up. Got a cigarette?"

Mac passed him the pack and lighter. "Seems funny the way dictators have gone out of style—even in the small countries—"

"World opinion," Rourke replied, lighting himself a smoke. "Dictators are no longer respected, that's all. It's like the savage tribes that once were cannibals." He returned the pack and lighter and slumped back in his seat. "Those savages gave up cannibalism when they got in contact with the outside world and learned what scorn and disgust their customs won in others' eyes. Same way with dictators."

"So now we've got world criminals. It hasn't changed much!"

"Fewer innocent people are killed, is all," Rourke agreed absently. "It takes all types to make a world—but the killers we have to eliminate!"

MAC STARED out at the other ship, saw it change course slight-

ly, and moved the controls to follow it. "They're ducking for the mountains." He blew smoke and grinned at Rourke. "I used to make practice radar runs over this country—know every rock and gully!"

"Where's our patrol fighter?" Rourke wondered.

"He'll be along. What do you think of the increase in world population, though? We stopped wars and we control famine—"

"If we control birth rate, now, we'll have it perfect!" Rourke smiled; he was beginning to like old Man McWilliams. "Or do you prefer wars and famine?" he asked mockingly.

"Nuts to both!" Mac retorted. "And nuts to your compulsory birth control, too. Preach me no Utopias, sonny—I've heard that tune before! The world's getting overpopulated; there's only one answer to any man worth his salt." He hooked a gnarled thumb toward the glittering stars. "Out there! We'll have to start colonizing Mars before too long."

"Still, birth control wouldn't hurt," Rourke needled him, mirthfully. "It simply wasn't handled right. A bunch of government 'experts' tried to cram it down peoples' throats! It's no wonder public opinion rebelled—"

Mac was giving a derisive snort when the call-light blinked green. He reached over and flipped the radio switch.

"UNAF Official Six-Four to Inspector Thomas Rourke. Acknowledge, please. Over."

Rourke leaned forward to reply, but Mac grasped his arm. "You're the brass here," he said quickly, "but put this fighter-jockey on my orders! I can run this mission!"

Rourke nodded, then spoke to the blank screen. "Inspector Rourke to UNAF Official Six-Four. Acknowledged; give your position. Over."

"Six-Four to Rourke. Am cruising at forty thousand; have you and the target both on my radarscope, directly below. With your permission, Inspector, I'll discharge a missile to finish the target and go home." The pilot's tones were flippant. "Is that okay? Over."

Mac was shaking his head emphatically. Rourke winked at him and spoke to the screen. "Six-four, that is not okay. Repeat, that is not okay. You will stand by and accept orders from my pilot, McWilliams. Acknowledge. Over."

"Six-four to Rourke. I'm to take orders from McWilliams. Over." The pilot sounded disgruntled.

Mac grabbed the screen and pivoted it to his side. "This is McWilliams—Mac to you, sonny. Open channel on this. I know you're logged with enough napalm, robot missiles, bombs, and guns to rip up a good-sized fortress by the roots, but this target is touchy! Got that?"

"Open channel. Got it."

"Good, good. I'll give you fire control visual, but first here's the brief: our target is an experimental airocket, manned by criminals. They have important aircraft plans with them which must not be destroyed. You'll have to set up your nose-cannon for a direct-fire pass—"

"But you're dodging through hills down there! I'd pile up at my speed!"

"There's some wide valleys in here too," Mac consoled him with a grin. "I'll have to call you down when you can dip into one and hit our target on the button. It's a setup for an angular attack; gauge about a one-second burst—"

"What d'you know about armament?"

"Son, I jockeyed jets before your daddy's voice changed! Stand by now—we're due to be crossing a valley in

about three minutes now—"

"Wilco!" There was a surprised respect in the pilot's voice.

Mac switched the cabin lights off.

AS ROURKE'S eyes adjusted to the darkness he began to make out the black humps of mountains below them. Slightly ahead now was the other ship's blue jet-fire. He could make out the sleek outline of its hull in the dim starlight, the glint of the transparent blister over its cabin.

"Three hundred miles an hour," Mac stated brusquely. "I've got to admit that guy knows the mountain peaks around here—or else he's a fool! Six-four, I'm moving in on him—"

"Don't risk their fire!"

"With hand guns? They stick a gun out at this speed, the wind'll tear their hand off!" Mac hunched over the controls, peering ahead. "Steady, six-four. Forty thousand. Southeast, four miles. Set your guns—"

"Now!"

The two airockets shot between looming, black peaks and hissed out over a broad, starlit valley.

It came and went in the blink of an eyelash. Out of the starry heavens, a shimmering, wicked-looking steel insect, its fins bristling with armament. Curving down into the valley, swooping straight toward the chubby airocket ahead. Orange flame blossomed from its needle-nose. Then it curved up, dwindling back into the night, leaving a blue streak of jet-fire behind it.

The airocket ahead jolted with the impact of 70-mm. cannon shells. Pieces of its hull flew away and a misty cloud of gasses enveloped it. The inertium bladder was punctured, the gasses escaping, condensing in the outer air—

Then it was plunging downward to

the boulder-strewn floor of the valley. It struck with an erupting cloud of sand and rock.

"Mission accomplished," Mac drawled. "You can go home now, six-four."

"Glad to oblige, old-timer! Sixty-four over and out."

MAC PEELED the airocket through a turn that skirted the steep face of a cliff, then brought it around toward the dark, broken hulk of the wreck below. He flared out, dropped the wheels, and eased the ship onto a wide strip of level, sandy wash.

"Flashlights in the tool compartment," he said. Rourke unstrapped and climbed back to get them.

They dropped down to the rocky ground and picked their way over it toward the wreck. Rourke shivered in the crisp, predawn chill. Mac paused and swept the beam of his flashlight over the torn, twisted hull. "Nothing alive in that," he said drily.

"It's a wonder the heat from the rocket unit didn't set the ship afire," Rourke mused.

"The rocket cut off automatically," Mac explained, then shrugged. "Well, let's get it over with."

The forward section of the hull was completely smashed, telescoped and shoved back into the midsection. The sealite gas-bladder hung out of a gaping rent in the side like a sick tongue. They walked up to the front of the wreck and lifted off the shattered remains of the cabin blister.

The body of Jan Lipenchek, alias Czecmelowicz, was a flabby rag doll thrown amidst the litter of the cabin floor. Miss Dorothea "Trixie" Finch had her lovely shape imbedded firmly in the instrument panel. Rourke stared down at the twisted head, the smear that had been a beautiful, appealing face. She wasn't whistling now.

"NEW YORK'S on the line, darling!"

Rourke muttered a curse, tore a sheet of paper out of the typewriter and crumpled it into a ball, flinging it to the floor. He whirled in his swivel chair, reaching across the desk to flip the switch from *intercom* to *videophone*.

Bill Warner's fleshy features stared back at him from the screen. "Hello, Tom."

"Hi," Rourke said, scowling.

"How's that article coming?"

"I'm writing it, man. I'm *writing* it."

Warner recoiled slightly. "Oh. Having trouble?"

"Oh no—nothing at all! I haven't had a thing to think about for weeks but your little old article—"

"Take it easy," Warner protested. "It's enough to have my boss jumping me because your article's not in, without you giving me a hard time! When'll you have it?"

"In the morning," Rourke slumped back, disgusted.

"Tonight," Warner insisted. "Get it on the midnight stratoexpress. My chair's getting hot."

"Say listen— I'm a big wheel now—a hero!" Rourke made wild gestures at the screen. "Tell your boss how lucky he'll be to get an article with my by-line!" He grabbed a newspaper off the stack on his desk and shoved it before the screen. "Look!"

Warner looked. Big headlines read: AIROCKETS EXEC HELPS POLICE CRACK WORLD CRIME RING.

"I know," Warner said. "That's the point."

"What's the point?"

"The boss wants your article," Warner explained. "Now, chum. While you *are* a hero. The Martian Expedition returns next month."

"Oh." Rourke slumped again, crestfallen. "I thought—well, never mind."

Warner grinned slyly. "Tonight then?"

"Okay!" Rourke waved feebly at the screen. "I'll send it off tonight. Give my love to all the little bug-eyed monsters."

"Right!" Warner chuckled warmly. "So long—*hero!*"

Rourke looked up in time to see a slim, shapely arm push open the office door. "Go right in, sir!" a soft voice spoke bewitchingly.

"Ahem—thank you!" Manny strode through the door, his brows raised and a happy expression on his pugish features. "Hi, Tommy! We got it boy; we got it!" He threw himself into a chair.

"We got what?" Rourke asked suspiciously. "And what's this 'Tommy' routine?"

"Simply that you've got the softest job an Inspector ever had!" Manny replied calmly.

"An insp—" Rourke broke off, staring at him. "You mean— I'm still in?"

MANNY nodded solemnly. "It is the considered opinion of Headquarters Staff that you're too valuable a man to be mustered out simply because of the undue publicity you've attracted to yourself in this case. While not only the identity, but the very activities, of a World Police Inspector must normally be kept secret—"

"But—but what about my job here?" Rourke stammered. "What about AiRockets? What about Old Man McWilliams?"

"—However, in your present capacity," Manny went on, unperturbed, "Headquarters finds that you are in a position to be of inestimable service to the United Nations."

"In my—my present capacity?"

"It seems there's a motion before the General Assembly at the moment which calls for the international registration and licensing of all private and commercial airockets—with an international bureau, you understand; not with national bureaus, as with jet-copters. And we're going to need someone on that bureau to see that no sharp politicians pull a loophole deal so a crime syndicate can buy airockets for its dirty work. AiRockets will be asked to send a representative of the industry, of course—"

"So I'll have both jobs."

Manny's eyes narrowed craftily. "I think Shadow Nine can manage it," he said in a low murmur.

"Are you my contact?" Rourke gave in quietly.

"You're still in my sector." Manny rose from his chair and plodded to the door. "Call me if you need any packages delivered. You know the number—United Air Delivery Service."

Rourke nodded. "Don't ask the brain any embarrassing questions!"

Manny waved a stubby hand, started through the door—and recoiled with an exclamation of pleasure. He grinned and winked at Rourke, then sidled out the side of the door as the smooth, curvacious young woman passed him on the way in.

"What's been going on in here?" Robbie Simakov demanded with an imperious tilt of her chin.

"I'm writing an article," Rourke said wearily.

"And inspiration just won't come, is that it?" She moved toward the desk, hips swaying to the rhythm of her stride.

"Something like that," Rourke hazarded.

"Well, we shouldn't let these weird-looking little men in to bother snookums then, should we?" She came around the desk. "We should comfort Tommy and—and give him inspiration—"

"Indeed we should!" Rourke agreed.

He wondered, happily, if Warner would mind—*really* mind—if the article didn't get finished until tomorrow....

THE END

7 - 11 ... BUT WHO WINS?

AN EXPERT in applied mathematics, Dr. H. D. Landahl, of the University of Chicago, is applying mathematics to gambling, and coming up with some vital statistics regarding gamblers.

According to Dr. Landahl, there are only four categories of gamblers and, using his mathematical techniques, he can not only classify a gambler as to type, but also even predict how he will react to a specific situation. The four types:

(1) The gambler who wants to make a killing, and will sacrifice anything for it. No matter how great the odds, if the

winning is high he'll take any risk.

(2) The calm type, cool and intelligent. He figures out everything against him, balances all the chances both pro and con, and invariably comes up the winner at the end of the year.

(3) The type who only gambles for the thrill of it, without seriously caring whether he wins or loses.

(4) And the gambler who bets only on a sure thing. His risk is always very small, and there's never any excitement in betting for him.

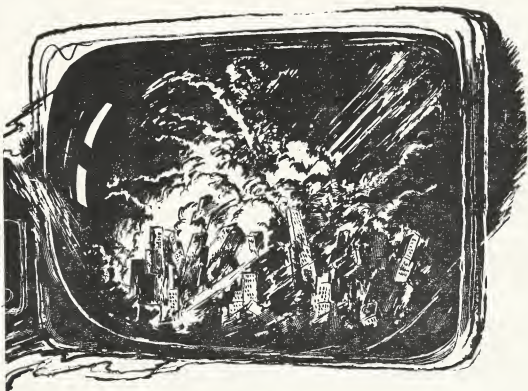
Which type are you? —Peter Dakin

THE INNKEEPER OF MARS

By Dex R. Moore



He shuddered at the horror reflected from his own brain



This strange innkeeper was brimming over with hospitality. He could persuade every Terran to remain on Mars forever. But his methods were, to say the least, unique

THE SETTING sun, sliding toward the dust-dimmed horizon of the red Martian desert, pushed before it shadows lance-tipped with cold. Five earth men, prodded by this swift, chilling advance of night, moved nervously from the shadow of their rocket ship. They gathered in an excited, feet-shuffling circle, leaning slightly toward the last faint rays of the distant sun.

A block-shouldered, darkly handsome young man known as "Smitty", the commander of the Space Ship *Virgin Star*, paced steps away from the

group. He moved slowly and deliberately, masking his blood-burning excitement behind a thoughtful frown and studied movement. The men were unstable now as an overheated engine pump. Smitty would have to hold them down.

He knew how to hold them, too. Ceremony, give them ceremony, he thought. Good for the nerves. And what better time or opportunity for ceremony. Neatly he assembled shining metal sections of a fourteen-foot flagstaff. Precisely he unfurled silken folds of stars and stripes.

As he worked he soaked up the frosty silence of desert dusk around him. When his men spoke, rarely, among themselves, he heard the whispers as if they were shoutings in a tile tunnel. He heard the words splinter away into the thin air. But the thoughts never touched him. Smitty was far too conscious of his very real importance, of the moment of their presence there on Mars, to know any thought, or any emotion other than triumph. Triumph swirling hot through the blood flushing his face.

Dackman, co-pilot and mineralogical expert, nudged a thin elbow into the ribs of the man beside him.

"Leave it to the Old Man to make a show of it!" Dackman whispered.

Porter, the engineer, grinned tightly, answered through barely opened, faintly cold-bluing lips. "And why not? The greatest show on earth—off earth, rather. The first men to conquer space! If that's not worth a show—" He stopped whispering. Smitty's consciousness had reached out and seized upon them again, held them, willingly enough, vise-like.

Smitty spoke solemnly, his short, stiff black moustache quivering, excitement pitching his voice high. "In the sight of God and these assembled witnesses I hereby claim this planet of Mars as a possession of the United States of America!"

With a powerful jab he thrust the spiked end of the flagstaff into rocky ground. The rod struck sparks and tilted sideways. Two men leaped forward and prodded it more solidly between reddish-brown stones.

FOR A TENSE moment of brittle silence the five Americans stared at each other. Calwell broke first. The chemist's long jaw dropped and from his small mouth came a big yell.

"Yip-yip-yipeee!" he howled. The sound went rabbit-hopping off among the rockpile hills of the desert. And as if suddenly uncorked, all the earth men yelled their throats raw and did savage-like dances. They had conquered space—landed on Mars. The first men on Mars.

Smitty calmed first. He was their leader, and must set the example. Straining to see out into the star-flecked night Smitty felt suddenly lonely, almost afraid. The burden of responsibility settled in a small lump in the bottom of his heart.

They traveled on foot then, exploring a circle of a mile around their ship. Lacking patience to wait till daylight, they stumbled about the tumbled terrain. Striking about them with powerful beams of light, the men called gleefully to each other at every discovery of a strange plant, or when a peculiar animal scurried across the range of their lights.

They were like boys, Smitty thought. Like boys playing at exploring in the woods. But it was hard to call them down. What danger, after all, could they encounter in this desolate, barren section of a world perhaps long dead? They were all heavily armed, trained soldiers as well as scientists. But a wary eye, even so, thought Smitty. Preparedness—

But even Smitty was unprepared when the attack came. The group paused on a high rocky rim. They stood silent, breath coming in quick puffs of vapor. Smitty adjusted the heating unit of his flying suit to warm him more. He relaxed his constant surveillance of the land around him for a moment, to set the thermostat. And in that moment the Martians attacked.

Rock clusters and boulders sprouted Martians in twos and threes; crevices and cracks spewed uniformed soldiers wearing rib-tubed masks and wielding

oval-barreled, cumbersome weapons. In an instant the earth men were surrounded by menacing figures.

Smitty loosed his sidearm from its holster and triggered flame and steel toward the nearest Martian. The soldier doubled in the middle, as if folding across a wire. Then from the barrel-shaped muzzles of the awkward Martian weapons feathered white streamers of vapor. The strange gas enveloped the earth men briefly, faded as swiftly as it came, and the battle was over.

Smitty awoke to the sound of voices. "He's coming around now. Give him a pot of *vron* and he'll be all right. A strong one, he is—the others will be out for a while yet."

Smitty's first thought was "where am I?" But he choked it back. Instead he opened his eyes to slits and looked to the sound of the voice.

THE BEING lolling at the round table reminded Smitty of something he had seen long ago in a nursery-rhyme book. A picture of a huge man who was said to eat ten cattle and several sheep and pigs at a meal, just for appetizers. The being Smitty stared at now sat bulging over the sides of an outsized chair. He was unbelievably fat, a moving, living hill of rolling flesh and brick-red skin. But for all his size and weight he moved his arms in swift, graceful motions over a game board on the table before him.

Smitty sat slowly, and silently, stared around the room wonderingly. Then he remembered the climax of the brief battle. The Martians must have loosed some sort of sleeping gas on them.

The gross red man swiveled his enormous head to peer at Smitty. He smiled, a slow, unwieldy lifting of

many wrinkles of mouth. "Ah! Welcome, Captain Smith, welcome to the Desert Inn!"

"Who are you?" Smitty demanded beligerently. "Where are my men? Who brought us here?"

The massive chest of the huge red man quivered with deep laughter. He moved a bone marker on the game board before answering. When he spoke he addressed others in the room, rather than Smitty. "Always the impatience! What is it about space travel that makes men so impatient, can you gentlemen tell me?"

A ripple of laughter spread through the room. For the first time Smitty became aware of other men, and other beings. Became aware of the vast room around him, of murmuring talk, the clack of bone markers on game boards, the whisper of shuffled cards. He felt warmth from a fire snapping resentfully at cold trying to creep through the walls.

The room loomed enormous before Smitty—vast in its proportions, scaled to the hulk of the red man. But it was comfortable-looking, homey. A fire muttered and snapped in an open fireplace of azure stone. Wide chairs of soft saffron leather promised deep comfort. All the pleasures of home, and more, like the short bar. Two men in robes and cowls of monk's cloth lounged at the yellowed wood counter sipping from flat glasses and regarding Smitty curiously.

"Where are my men?" Smitty demanded again, bringing his attention back to the gross red man.

"They are perfectly well," he assured Smitty in a kindly tone. "Sleeping longer from the effects of the gas, is all. They will be brought downstairs when they recover."

"Now let me introduce myself and serve you a pot of *vron*, eh? I am

known as Brevy, the Innkeeper of Mars." He moved from his chair, surprisingly agile for his bulk. From a copper brazier he took a round-bellied pot of metal-blended azure and emerald and gold from the fires of countless years.

After drinking a full pot of the strong, bitter tea, Smitty felt strength warming his muscles again. Confidence came sallying hesitantly back from hiding.

"We are prisoners here?" Smitty asked cautiously.

"Not at all," the Innkeeper assured him jovially. "Of course you will be restrained from leaving for the first day and night. A period of orientation, you see. After that—" the Innkeeper smiled, a grotesque and yet friendly expansion of his wide mouth. "But no one ever leaves," he said finally.

SMITTY remained silent, pondering.

Captured and brought here by force, but they weren't prisoners. Of course no one ever left, but they weren't prisoners. Now that made real sense!

"Tell me how you came here, to Mars, I mean, eh?" the Innkeeper said, genuine interest in his voice.

"In the Space Ship *Virgin Star*," Smitty said, pride strong in his voice.

The Innkeeper smiled, then chuckled. "The first rocket ship from Earth—well, how technology does advance. Another hundred years, perhaps, and we will be forced to adopt new defenses."

Smitty grunted noncommittally. Double-talk. Let him rave on. Meanwhile Smitty would be taking in the details, and figuring for an escape. From here it looked easy. But Smitty had long ago learned to beware of appearances. He would be cautious, but he had to find a way out for his men. A way back to their ship.

The circle of strange men gathered around did nothing to raise Smitty's confidence. There was an acetic-faced little Englishman Brevy addressed as Carlyle. The two cowed men, one of them wearing a beard that must have been frizzled white and tobacco-stained when Methuselah was a lad. Three otter-like men crowded near the circle, and a giant Greek-god type swaggered in from a corner to peer at him.

Smitty backed away and found a chair by himself in the corner. He had to be alone awhile, to think.

Hours later the men of Smitty's crew had recovered and were led shakily down the spiral flight of yellow wood stairs. They ate ravenously, and drank deep of the steaming, bitter, but refreshing *vron*.

Smitty left his men huddled at a table in a corner of the great room and peered out a low, wide window. Dusk was spilling over the tops of far-away hills in the west. Shadows of pacing Martian sentries cast long shadows angling up the walls of the Inn.

"Not prisoners," Smitty grumbled to himself.

He turned at the touch of a hand on his shoulder. The sour-mouthed little Englishman was striving to form a smile. Smitty turned slowly toward him, gesturing mutely with a thumb towards the outside.

"Oh, the guards," Carlyle said casually. "They'll pull out tomorrow and we can walk outside again."

"Yes?" Smitty demanded sarcastically. "Then what? A moat surrounding the castle, perhaps? Or do they have secret rays, like in the comics back home?"

THE ENGLISHMAN raised his eyebrows in a silent question. "Oh—I see what you mean," he said after a

time. "You're still thinking about escape, of course."

"Of course," Smitty agreed, mimicking the brittle voice.

"You could leave any time after the orientation period," Carlyle assured him solemnly. "But you won't want to. Nothing to stop you, though, you know. Nothing physical, except the desert, and the fact that there is nowhere to go—no reason to leave."

"If you think I'm going to stay here," Smitty spoke vehemently. "If you think I'm going to let my men stay cooped up here, prisoners for the rest of—" Smitty let the sentence die unfinished. Brevy, Innkeeper of Mars, approached him with a rolling but silent gait.

"Gentlemen," Brevy greeted them cheerily. "Having an earnest little talk, eh? Has Captain Smith been regaling you with his plans to escape, eh?" Brevy jabbed a ham-like elbow into Carlyle's ribs and laughed till Smitty thought the big red man would choke.

"Yes, I have," Smitty admitted quietly. "I intend to get out of here with my men as soon as we can. And God help anyone who gets in our way when we get ready to leave!"

Brevy laughed again. "Really, Captain, I assure you that no one will try to stop you. But wait until after the movies tonight, won't you?"

"Movies?" Smitty said, surprised.

"Of course," Brevy agreed jovially. "We always have movies when new men come here. We find it very entertaining—and informative."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Smitty grumbled.

"Of course not, of course not!" cried Brevy jovially. "But you will. He will, eh, Carlyle?" Again he laughed quiveringly. Then his mood changed suddenly. "Tell me, Captain. Why did you come to Mars? That is, why did you

risk the journey, the peril, the unknown?" He peered at Smitty, solemn inquiring with his eyes.

"Why?" Smitty echoed, perplexed. "Why, for centuries man has striven to conquer space! For centuries it has been the dream of men, of all ages, of all cultures. To fly off to the stars, to conquer the vast reaches of the cosmos, to widen the horizon and the frontier of science and knowledge, to—to—" Smitty paused to search out a phrase worthy of the thought. He forgot the search when he saw Brevy and Carlyle smiling sadly at each other. "What's so amusing?" Smitty demanded.

Brevy spoke solemnly again. "Captain Smith, I have been here, serving in the role of Innkeeper of Mars for—well for more time than has been recorded on some of the planets. It seems I have always been here."

"Through the ages men come here." He lifted an arm and pointed in a sweeping arc around the huge room. "Look. As you say, men from all ages, men from all cultures, men from all planets. They come to Mars, they are brought here, they remain..."

"I don't understand," Smitty said, deeply puzzled.

"You will—" Brevy said slowly. "You see, here on Mars we have lived past the peak of our civilization. Our culture was ancient when Atlantis, on your Earth, was born. We have been abroad in the universe. And we have returned, having learned the lessons taught by the vastness of space. The lessons of humility, and love of our home."

"We want no invasion here, Captain Smith. And we have no real arms, now, to fight it off. But we have our quiet ways. As the men come here in their various manners—by black magic, by teleportation, by rocket—we bring them here. And after they see the

truth they stay here, and live on with us in peace, never wanting to leave. And, never leaving, they slow the progress of their followers. I imagine it will be years before a rocket comes from earth again, Captain. Eventually, I suppose, we will have to resort to different methods. But—"

"Well, you won't keep us here," Smitty said matter-of-factly.

"Please—" Brevy said, holding up a wide palm to request silence. "Please—wait until after the movies tonight."

"Yeah, we'll wait," Smitty agreed, turning to watch the pacing shadows of the sentries outside.

AFTER THE evening meal, served with much ceremony to celebrate the arrival of the newcomers, everyone gathered for the "movies." There were more than thirty men in all, over half of them earth-men of various ages and eras. The others were from all planets of the Solar System except Mercury and Pluto.

They all drew up chairs in the main room of the Inn, and Brevy darkened the lights. Smitty watched the proceedings with a tolerant smile until Brevy approached him. In his hands the Innkeeper held a metallic, dome-like cap to which were attached three strands of golden wires.

"Will you honor us, Captain Smith?" Brevy asked politely.

"Do what?" Smitty drew back in surprise.

"The movies," Brevy explained patiently. "You see, we draw our pictures from the subconscious minds of our guests—"

"How's that?" Smitty demanded suspiciously.

"This little cap," Brevy said. "It picks up the subconscious thoughts, dreams, fears of the wearer and projects them on a screen where we all can view them."

"Like movies," Smitty said, beginning to understand.

"Like movies," Brevy agreed. "From them we will learn why you left Earth, perhaps."

"We left earth in the interest of Science," Smitty answered seriously.

"True enough," Brevy agreed. "But—"

"We have conquered space," Smitty interrupted proudly. "We are the first to span the distance in a rocket ship—that is—well, we thought we were," Smitty amended, looking at the collection of men in the darkened room.

"All men think they span space to conquer new horizons," Brevy said soothingly. "But have you ever considered that they—that you—were afraid?"

"We were all afraid, I guess," Smitty admitted. "But we came anyway."

"You came anyway, yes. Always there is some fear driving men on in spite of fear. Some fear so finely transmuted, so deeply hidden that it manifests itself as—the spirit of adventure. In Carlyle's time, there, it was magic, demons. In your time, what?"

"I—I don't know what you're talking about!" Smitty declared truthfully.

"On with the movies, then," Brevy said cheerily. He fitted the metal cap onto Smitty's head, who submitted reluctantly but silently.

Brevy made adjustments on a machine in the back of the room, and soon silent moving pictures appeared on a screen for all to see.

IT WAS a strange montage that showed first. A blur of parades, bands and banners on sunny afternoons, brief glimpses of conferences in secret rooms, then the take-off of the rocket *Virgin Star* that had brought them to Mars.

Then the montage faded and pictures came in orderly sequence. The chambers of the United Nations appeared, a huge room astir with frantic activity. A hard-featured, square faced man was delivering an apparently bitter harrangue into a microphone. The picture faded, and after a brief period of blackness reappeared focused on a group of men angrily stuffing documents into brief-cases.

"The American delegation!" Smitty whispered, recognizing the faces of the men.

The American delegation stalked out of the United Nations Building and the picture faded out as their backs disappeared into whirling streaks of snow.

High in the stratosphere the picture found gigantic missiles sweeping across the Atlantic. Each missile was a hundred feet long, each a rocket carrying a warhead...

A map of the United States appeared, as seen from one hundred miles high. The rockets nosed down, scattered, and took varying trails. Suddenly New York City reeled under the tremendous blow of the atomic rocket bomb, a pall of smoke mushroomed up toward the trails of other rockets destined for Washington, D.C., for Boston, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Chicago—

"No!" Smitty whispered hoarsely. "No, they can't—they can't! We're not ready—" He stood up suddenly, tore the cap from his head. Clutching the metal dome he stood rod-straight, staring at the Innkeeper. Brevy's talk of fears driving men to conquest whirled in his mind. Doubt began casting pale shadows on his self-assuredness.

Then Captain Steven Smith gave his last official order. "Porter, you try it," Smitty directed.

Porter donned the metal cap. Once

again the room darkened, and again pictures flashed on the screen.

The sequence differed slightly from the pictures drawn from Smitty's mind. But the end result was the same. The "movies" ended with scenes of devastating atomic warfare ravaging America.

SMITTY sat erect, motionless, in the hushed, darkened room. He felt alone and helpless, as if protective walls had crumbled around him. Finally he turned toward Brevy again. "That—that is what our fears are, you believe?" Smitty asked, reaching blindly to find his old self-assurance.

"Men's fears change with changing times," Brevy said solemnly. "But always it drives them on toward far horizons."

"So we've run away from it all," Smitty said, bitterness creeping into his voice. "You hear that, men? We couldn't take it, so we ran away from home!"

Shuffled feet, a cleared throat, nervous laughter answered him.

Smitty looked around the huge room once again. "Well—we're here. Let's make ourselves comfortable while we think it over." Smitty walked slowly away from the group and sat by the fire. He sat silent and alone for the rest of the night, trying to fit Brevy's strange philosophy into the shattered pattern of his world.

Smitty had lost track of time, as such, when the newcomers arrived. The language changed automatically, by telepathic means, to a dialect spoken in China.

"A new group of daring space-voyageurs," Smitty thought bitterly.

The young Chinese rocket commander sought Smitty out and engaged him in a game of Martian chess. "You look like an active one," the Chinese said. "Together I believe we can es-

cape from this place."

"Escape?" Smitty said resignedly. A distant look came into his eyes. "Oh, yes. You're still thinking about escape, of course."

"Of course," the Chinese agreed with exaggerated patience.

"You could leave any time after the

THE END

orientation period," Smitty assured him solemnly. "But you won't want to. There is no place to go. No reason to leave."

"Really," the Chinese said dryly.

"Sure," Smitty said cheerfully. "You can 'escape'. But wait a while—wait until after the movies tonight."

OF TIME AND MESONS

SHORT-LIVED phenomena are no novelty to science, but it is doubtful whether anything comparable with the "neutral meson" has ever been considered before. In the fantastic jungle of confusion which constitutes modern physics, particles which make up the building blocks of matter exist in profusion, some long-lived, some short-lived. The mesons, those strange blends of matter and energy whose role in atomic physics can't really be determined—yet—have amazing properties.

This neutral meson, detected at very high altitudes during cosmic-ray showers, has a life measured in a few hundred million-millionths of a second! Cloud chambers sent up by balloon to heights of twenty miles or so catch bursts and showers of disintegrating atoms under cosmic-ray bombardment. Photographic plates of extreme sensitivity are used. Electron paths, proton paths and other atomic particles are easily recorded in the form of long curving tracks.

But also on the plate appear very short tracks with almost no curvature. These tracks, little more than blobs of visibility, are the trails of neutral mesons. Measurement of the lengths of their paths determines the age of the particle which is created in the cosmic-ray collision, to die almost as rapidly as it appears.

Right now tremendous effort is about to classify and record all atomic particles. Mesons—neutral, positive and negative—along with a host of other varieties, usually called simply by a Greek letter such as alpha, beta, etc., constitute a good portion of the record. Just how these mesons fit into the energy picture of atomic action is unknown. It is felt generally, however, that the meson behavior will eventually supply the clue as to what makes atoms into rigid units. Mesons appear to be the glue which holds subatomic particles together!

—June Lucie

FOLLOW that WIND!

SCIENTISTS now have a new method for studying winds shifting 40 to 70 miles above the earth. From photographs made near Las Cruces, New Mexico, as part of a program sponsored by the United States Naval Bureau of Ordnance, turbulence in the upper atmosphere can be closely studied. It is reported that the speed of these winds can now be told within five miles an hour.

Since a meteor flashing through space leaves a luminous trail of debris, which gets blown about by winds resembling hurricanes, these measurements can be easily made with meteor-train photography. To get the wind speed, the trail is photographed every two seconds.

The first such successful photographs were taken December 22, 1951, with a Baker Super-Schmidt camera. —Salem Lane

THE LAST ALIBI

MAN'S EFFORTS to improve his way of life have led to new developments in science and technology. And now he must improve himself to keep pace with the machines he builds and operates.

Strength is limited. His ability to react to sudden changes is limited. Electronic radar-eyes may help his vision. Various mechanical or electrical powers may add to his strength. There are various mechanical aids which have been developed which can help him to adapt to sudden crises.

As mechanical performances increase, new problems are created by man's physical limitations. Paradoxically enough, modern science can thank mankind's limitations, which are really responsible for the new frontiers always arising to be crossed, in the way of new scientific discoveries to ring his livelihood.

—Tom Neal

DOPPLE SPOTS DUMMIES

By Ralph Cox

MANY, VARIED and interesting are the stories told of how radar can be fooled and jammed by dropping strips of aluminum foil. This was standard practice during World War II, and it is probably being done at present in Korea. This shredded aluminum foil, known as "window", has the faculty of reflecting radar waves in a random fashion, thoroughly fouling up the radar screens of the defenders, confusing them and even making it impossible for radar-directed gun-fire to go to work on the raiding planes or missiles. It is customary for a group of attacking aircraft to dump large quantities of window over an area known to be defended by radar-equipped anti-aircraft sites.

But, as with every ingenious development, a countereffect has been worked out which may make the use of window useless. It involves the construction of a radar device which can distinguish between the slowly falling window, the slowly moving planes, the stationary objects, and the high-speed attacking planes. This countereffect employs an old physical principle known as the "Doppler effect".

The Doppler effect refers to the fact that a wave radiated or reflected from a moving object (sound or radio) has a frequency (to a stationary observer) which depends upon the relative speeds. Astronomers have used the Doppler effect (red shift) for determining the radial speeds of the remotest stars and galactic clusters. Anyone who has listened to the sound of a train whistle or an overhead plane has noticed the Doppler effect unconsciously. In the case of the train, the pitch of the whistle changes as the train goes by. Coming toward you, it increases in pitch; going away, it decreases.

A radar unit, sensitive to the slight changes in frequency caused by rapidly moving planes, can thus differentiate between say, window, and an attacking machine. Using this principle, radars are no longer hopelessly confused by the jamming and window devices employed by the attackers. It is hard to imagine any countereffect to this technique, but no doubt some ingenious person will invent one!

SALAMANDERS SUFFER FOR MAN

*By
Walt Crain*

DR. GERHARD FRANKHAUSER of Princeton University has been given a grant recently from the American Cancer Society, to experiment with the salamander for more information on the scourge of cancer. The salamander is a lizard-type creature which is hatched in water, spends about three years on land, then goes back to the water to breed, get old, and die. One of its outstanding abilities is its remarkable power to regenerate lost parts of itself—for example, when one of its legs is cut off, a new one grows. It is precisely this regenerative quality which has made this animal a favorite of experimental biologists.

Normally, the salamander, like all other creatures, inherits two sets of chromosomes—one from each parent—the chromosomes which contain the genes deciding physical characteristics: whom we resemble, and so on. One of the more interesting and important experiments which Dr. Frankhauser does on this creature is to double its genes. By merely raising or lowering the temperature 15 degrees, he produces salamanders with from three to seven sets of chromosomes. Despite the extra supply, the salamanders grow to their usual size, except that they possess giant cells. It's especially interesting to note this difference from plants. The extra chromosomes cause both plants and their cells to grow to an abnormal size. Since, when control over growth is lost, normal cells turn into cancer cells, this observation is of particular importance.

Dr. Frankhauser has taken advantage of the salamander's power of regenerating lost parts by performing some amazing experiments. One of them concerns the pituitary gland, a gland that lies in the middle of the head and controls normal growth. He grafts a pituitary gland under the skin of a baby salamander. The normal three-year adolescent period of development on land is then accelerated—the creature sheds its skin and goes back to the water, where it matures rapidly.

When the thyroid gland is removed from a baby salamander, he doesn't come out of the water to finish his life cycle in the usual way, while, when baby salamanders are given thyroxin, a fluid produced by the thyroid, they leave the water prematurely to live on land.

DEADLY DUST

By Gerald Vance



Where the man had stood, a cloud of filmy dust appeared

DAWSON removed the heavy shell-rimmed glasses and rubbed them along the side of his fleshy nose. The gesture was a giveaway. He didn't like the story line.

"Hold it," he said. "No use going further. It'll be hokum from start to finish. I tell you, the public is getting fed up with axe murders, sex cases, hopped-up kid heisters, and so on. I'm

looking for a new angle, something that will grab hold of the reader's imagination and make him *want* to know what's going to happen next."

"But Fred," J. Jones protested. "This isn't fiction I'm writing. It's fact detective. Sure, I'll go along with you on maintaining reader interest. But I don't have the latitude the fiction boys have."

Could Giarni, possessed of a secret weapon, hold an entire city at bay? Giarni couldn't be sure, but he certainly did intend to try



"You say you're a writer," Dawson said. "Prove it."

"Okay. Throw me a line."

Dawson replaced the glasses. The smile remained and Jay had the sudden notion that with slanted eyes Dawson could have sat for a Buddha portrait. Even to the minus quantity of hair.

"All right, Jay," Dawson said. "I don't do this for everyone. But I like you. See what you can do with this. Six years ago a man named Mario Giarni was convicted of selling highly confidential papers to an agent of a foreign government. All during his trial he claimed innocence. Now get this! His wife and his coworker gave evidence which aided the government's case. He got ten years. I made it a point to mention the six years because he was let out about three weeks ago. Think you can do anything with that?"

"The wife and coworker were in cahoots. You got me dreaming, Fred. All I need is a commitment."

"No commitments. Just write it and send it in. It happened in your own back yard."

"San Francisco? Swell. Cuts the expense account. You can expect the manuscript in about a month...."

THERE HAD been surprisingly little in the newspapers about the case. The only one to give it front page for more than a day had been the *News-Chronicle*, and only for the reason of that sheet's being anti-administration. Even so there hadn't been too much meat on the bone.

J. Jones had spent his first morning in San Francisco chasing down the various pieces on file in the newspaper morgues. He learned that Mario Giarni had been a physicist in the Bayshore Federal Laboratory in South San Francisco, working on the newest

top-priority project, the cosmic-ray research, when Federal Bureau of Security agents had apprehended him in the act of selling highly confidential information to an agent of a foreign country. There had been a leak for some time and finally it had been traced to Giarni. The two who had contributed most of the evidence against the man were Jean Giarni, his wife, and Walter Finchely, his coworker. There was no question but Giarni had been judged by that evidence. But Jones was not the kind of man to be balked by blank walls. He had a stubborn streak a yard wide, the gall of a press agent, and the nerve of a test pilot flying supersonic atomic-powered experimental planes. More important, however, he had a cold, lucid mind that could assimilate facts and pare them down to the important essentials.

Armed with this information, J. Jones decided to hold the Giarni case as a thing apart and view it from as many story angles as possible.

As of the moment he could only work with three of those angles. The wife, the coworker, and Giarni himself. Of the three, Giarni, oddly, would have been the easiest to run down. Jones knew Bill Bryce, local head of the F. B. S., well enough to call him by his first name. Bryce had often given him information not available to others because he knew Jones was not the man to use it without fictionalizing it out of resemblance to the facts. Jones was also aware of the fact that the F. B. S. in cases of national security kept an up-to-the-minute file even when the case was dead. He decided his first course of action should be a phone call to Bryce.

Bryce's Harvard accent always brought a smile to Jones. "Why," Bryce asked, "you mean Jay 'Hawk-

shaw' Jones, boy detective? This is a pleasant surprise! What can I do for you?"

"Have a drink with me," Jones said.

"Good deal. Palace Hotel lobby in an hour okay?"

"I'll be there," Jones said.

"WELL, WHAT'S on your mind?"

Bryce asked as they settled themselves at the bar.

"As usual, a favor. I want to know the whereabouts of Mario Giarni."

Bryce studied the remainder of his Martini, an onion impaled on a toothpick. After a moment he swallowed the onion and laid the toothpick carefully beside the glass. "Just Giarni's whereabouts, eh? You're sure you don't want to know anything about the case itself?"

"Everything! But not from you. I'm going to do a fact story on the business for my editor and I'll do the coloring. But using only those colors supplied by the principals involved, if I can. You F.B.S. guys are too harshly realistic. All you want are the facts in the case and the proof of the charge.

"I want to know what makes a man like Giarni commit treason. It might have been for money alone. On the other hand there could have been a dozen reasons other than that."

"Yes. And you're right about us: We can't afford to be otherwise. The moment we are swayed by the motives involved we get off the path we must follow. But I know you understand that. I'll play ball with you, Jay, until you try to steal home on me. You adopted this baby. Have fun with it. Mario Giarni is living at the Howard Arms on Howard just off Third. If you don't find him in this afternoon you'll find him in one of any of the taverns on Broadway east of Kearney, during the night."

"The International Settlement—?"

"Right."

Jones said, "Hunh? I don't get it."

Bryce had a boyish grin. He gave Jones a blast of it. "Let's not forget, Jay. Your own coloring. Remember?"

Jones' "Yeah" sounded crestfallen. Bill Bryce didn't have to take him so literally. Well, just one other question and the chase would begin. "How do I know my pigeon?"

"Easy. He's a little man who will be in need of a haircut and probably a shave. Black hair streaked with grey. Wears a Navy surplus raincoat and an odd pair of pants and jacket. No hat. You can't miss or mistake him. He'll be carrying a child's accordion and will offer to play any tune you might want to hear. But the tune will always be the same, *The Skater's Waltz*."

"You mean he's nuts?"

BRYCE brought up one hand and looked at the wrist watch. "Tell you what," he said. "I'll buy you a drink. Then I've got to get back to the office. A drink for luck. You'll need it, fella."

It wasn't the answer Jones was expecting. Suddenly he had the feeling he was going to need luck. Lots of it.

It had been a long and wearing night for J. Jones. The Howard Arms had proved to be little better than a flop house. Giarni lived there, all right, but wasn't in. Nor did they know where he might be found. That had been in the late afternoon. Jones had dinner in the Tonga Room of the Fairmont then drove to the corner of Kearny and Broadway and parked his car.

Looking east as far as he could see was a vista of taverns, high and low in quality. If nothing else he knew he was in for a night of drinking.

Now, shortly after midnight, he sat in the Copra Hut, an artist's idea of a South Sea bar. There were a dozen or so customers, some at the bar and oth-

ers in the booths along one wall. Jones sat at the far curve of the bar where he could see any one entering the tavern. The Scotch-and-water before him was his tenth of the night. He took a long pull of his drink and reflected, sadly; this is really a wild-geese chase. Hell! Giarni might have walked into any one of the taverns after you left. Call it a night, Jonesy. Stakeout the Howard Arms tomorrow all day. From Giarni's description you can't miss him.

Lost as he was in his thoughts he hadn't seen the man who had entered. It was Mario Giarni. Exactly as Bryce had described him.

Jones felt his breath quicken. In a few moments the chase would begin. He wondered where this one would lead. He would soon find out. Giarni had worked his way along the bar until Jones would be the next approached.

"Some music, mister? Play anything you want. You name it," Giarni said.

Jones studied the other's face. Triangular in shape, it was highlighted by a strong nose and chin. The dark eyes were somnolently lidded, and the mouth had a one-cornered smile. The face was that of a man in the throes of some wild humor, yet the manner, strangely, was self-effacing.

Giarni kept fingering the child's accordion. "Gimme anything you want to, mister. Quarter, dime..."

"Sure you can play for me," Jones said. "Know *'Tenderly'*?"

Giarni nodded and began to play. *The Skater's Waltz*

Jones took a half-dollar from the change on the bar and gave it to Giarni. "Hey! That was pretty good. Now how about the *Skater's Waltz*?"

For just an instant Giarni's smile faded, and the lids became almost closed. The instant passed and once more he was smiling. "Thanks, mister, but that's one tune I don't know."

Jones reached out and took hold of Giarni's sleeve. "Let me buy you a drink, Mario," Jones said. He looked beyond the little man and saw an empty booth. "We can be private in there."

"Why don't you guys let up?" Giarni asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Need a picture? You know what I mean. I'm on the straight and narrow."

IT DAWNED on Jones that Giarni thought him a Federal agent. He slid from the stool and piloted Giarni to the booth and shoved him gently into it.

"Drink?" he asked.

Giarni didn't want one.

Jones ordered a Scotch-and-water for himself. He took a long pull at it, then forgot it. "You've got me wrong, Mario," he said. "I'm not a cop."

"Oh? Funny! You should be, mister. You act like one. Then what's on your mind?"

"I don't quite know," Jones said. He fiddled with his drink. "Why the act, Mario? This talk, like a character out of a Class B suspense movie."

"That wasn't Bayshore Laboratory I was in for six years," Giarni said. He sat deep in the corner, accordion beside him. His face was still and guarded. "It's the only language you get to understand. You call me Mario, and I'll bet my last dollar someone tipped you I'd be here. What's the pitch?"

It was plain to Jones. Giarni, suspicious by nature, had been made more so by his approach. It was going to take a lot of talking the little man could understand to allay that suspicion. Jones knew he had to pick his words with care.

"Okay! I was waiting for you."

There's a plenty good reason why. Would it mean anything to you if I said I was a writer of fact detective articles?"

"Should it?" Mario asked brusquely.

"It could. I might be able to prove you were unjustly jailed."

"Why is it," Giarni wanted to know, "that you guys can always prove a guy innocent *after* he's done his time?" His voice grew bitter: "What are you going to do, get my job back for me? My wife? The respect I once knew? Do me a favor. Just let me alone!"

"If that's what you want," Jones said quietly.

"That's what I want."

Jones threw his hands up. "You're a fool! That, or you're so warped you can't see straight. I think you were framed. Listen! I went to the trouble of reading up on your case. But there wasn't anything to read. So I decided to hunt you up and get your side of it. The side you didn't tell on the stand. And you're not the only one I'm going to talk to. Your ex-wife, and Walter Finchley, among others."

Giarni shook his head. His voice was no longer bitter. Merely empty: "Thanks, mister. It won't do any good. I used to dream about coming back into my own, but I gave that dream up long ago. Now I've got better dreams. I wish you luck with Jean and her husband, Walter Finchley."

"You mean?" Jones was startled.

"You didn't know? Sure. A year after I was sentenced. But it's a good match. They'll eat each other up."

A strange thought took hold of J. Jones. It was as if he had been suddenly confronted by a mysterious closet and had been given a key to open it. What dark and perhaps terrible things would he find in its depth? Whose skeleton would rattle a tune

for him? He had come to the fork in the road, and had to decide: Would it do any good trying to keep pumping Giarni? He thought not. But he had to make sure the little man would be around when he wanted him.

"Be around?" Giarni asked. "Sure! But I got an idea there'll be a couple of people who'll wish I weren't."

It was a dark note to leave the little man on, but Jones heard that in Giarni's voice which told him the well of talk had dried up, at least for this night.

THE BIG man wore a dark hat pulled low on his forehead. He stood just inside the entrance to a store, far enough not to be seen quickly, and he kept his eyes on the corner of Sacramento and Kearny. A small man came along the street, a child's accordion strung to his chest by a strap.

The big man smiled without humor and crossed the street. "Hello, Mario."

Giarni stopped short, and took a single backward step. He looked up and his face lost its tightness, became soft, frightened.

"You said you wouldn't bother me this week!"

The big man spread his arms. "I wasn't," he said. There was no apology in his voice. "I ran out of dough a while back at Chin Lee's. I'll need ten."

"I—I haven't got it. It was a tough night."

"It'll be tougher you don't dig up the scratch."

"How long are you going to bleed me, Mason?" Giarni asked.

Mason reached out with a casual hand and slapped the little man. The blow sent Giarni staggering. Two men walking by stopped, but hurried on at the big man's growl: "Get going!"

The big man took two steps for-

ward, grabbed a handful of Giarni's coat and pulled him close. "Don't ever let me hear you say you ain't got it, punk! I'll throw you in the can so far no one'll ever find you. Now bring it up. Quick!"

"Please! My accordion! You'll break it."

Mason laughed thickly in a pleased way, and shoved Giarni from him.

Giarni bent his head as though he wanted to see the damage to the instrument. His fingers stroked it, went along the keys, behind them. Mason kept watching but couldn't make out what Giarni was doing. Giarni's head lifted. His right hand remained behind the accordion. His lips were thin and tight and his chin trembled slightly.

"All right. All right, Mason," he said. "I'll give it to you."

His right hand came out. There was a thick tube of dull metal in the fingers. The tube looked like a misshapen gun. Giarni pointed the tube at the big man and thumbed a switch along the side. A pale blue glow showed at the muzzle end, faded and died.

And where once Mason stood there was only an untidy bundle of clothes covered with a film of dust as grey as the fog....

"If you'd only left me alone," Giarni whispered. "Damn you! Dirty cop! Well, you're through bleeding men like me."

Giarni looked right and left quickly. The street was empty. He sighed shudderingly. He knew what the gun could do; he had used it on stray dogs and cats. This was the first time he had used it on a human. A hard look of excitement brightened his eyes as his glance fell on the dusty bundle of clothes.

The power to kill!

HE LOOKED up and down the street again. A man and woman

came out of a tavern midway along the street and weaved unsteadily toward him. Panic hurried his steps away from the tell-tale mark of destruction.

They were too drunk to notice the strange heap of garments.

The room had an odor of cheap disinfectant and warm stale air. A brass bed took up most of the space. A cracked chest of drawers made the base of a triangle between two walls. To the left of the door was the bathroom, the luxury which made it a two-dollar room in a hotel which featured dollar rooms to one-and-all.

Giarni snapped the switch and weak light almost filled the room. He put the accordion carefully on the bed and sank into the chair alongside. After a moment he rose and undressed and went into the bathroom and let the shower run warm. He toweled himself hard, tossed the damp towel into the wash basin, went into the other room and changed into clean fresh underclothes. From a wall closet he took a brown sport shirt and brown suit and put them on. He put powder into his shoes, put fresh socks on. Once more he strapped the accordion across his chest. He took a last look at the room and turned the light out.

His eyes had a polished brightness that seemed more animal than human. But the smile playing over his lips was that of a child.

The night man at the desk was used to Giarni's odd-hour wanderings. He gave the little man a moody nod, went back to the scratch sheet he was figuring. Giarni walked down to Market and crossed the street and waited for a car to come along.

The clock above the Anglo-American Bank said one.

Giarni boarded an L car, got off at Seventh, saw a McAllister bus was on the point of leaving and made it in time. Thirty-five minutes later he got

off at Playland and walked the two blocks to the beach.

A damp chill sent a shiver through the strange figure. Fog shrouded the sea a hundred yards from shore. But he could see the breakers' white plumes washing Seal Rocks. He crossed the wide drive, walked slowly toward Cliff House and the baths beyond. On the beach to his left solitary fires held hardy souls around their edges, boys and girls having fun with a stick and a wiener. Now and then a shouted word or a line from a song was borne to him on the wind. But his face and glance were set to the Cliff House ahead.

But that was not his goal.

Instead, at the last hundred yards of steep ascent he turned inward toward the sea and descended the stairway leading down to the sand. He walked carefully on the packed sand, always keeping close to the rocks. He stopped in the shelter of a shallow cove and sank to his haunches. His eyes never left the spotlighted rocks on which the small movements of the seals were like jerking puppets on a string. The gulls swooped and plunged with airy grace. The sound of the surf was like a hammer beating in his skull.

He sat without moving for a long time.

The lights which bathed the Cliff House in a spectral glow plunged into abrupt blackness. And one by one the fires died on the beach. Now there were no other sounds but the dim ones of tires swishing on the drive above, the heavier sound of surf and the crying of the gulls.

The little man slipped the accordion from his shoulders, held it across his lap. His fingers moved gently over the keys, found the one which opened the keyboard and pressed it with his thumb. His hand went behind the keyboard, came out with the dull metal

tube. He held it loosely on his knee, pointed it toward the rocks ahead, pressed the switch. The pale light glowed, faded and died. His hand waved it back and forth a dozen times, up and down another dozen.

Now there were only the sound of the booming surf and the swish of auto tires. The gulls no longer cried.

Dust has no voice.

The clock above the Anglo-American Bank said two-thirty when Mario Giarni recrossed Market on the way to the Howard Arms.

J. JONES read the two-paragraph bit about the dust-covered heap of men's garments found on Kearny Street with a great deal of interest. He noted the fact that the clothes belonged to one Lem Mason, a police detective. He also saw the larger piece which told of the mysterious disappearance of the seals from Seal Rocks. He saw nothing to connect the two items.

He clipped out the piece about the garments, took a last swallow of his coffee, picked up the check and paid it at the cashier's. He went through the hotel lobby, down the stairs to the underground garage where he kept his car and waved for an attendant to bring it. He noticed a phone booth nearby, thought to call Bill Bryce before driving out to the Federal Building, and hurriedly made the call.

Bryce's voice had a busy note in it. But he didn't turn Jones' request down. He hoped that it would not take too long, that was all.

Ten minutes later Jones parked the blue Chevie Bel-Air in front of the Federal Building on Leavenworth Street and trotted up the wide steps. He had to wait in the outer office for a few minutes. Bryce was busy on something.

It turned out the something was the Mason mystery.

"I noticed it in the *News-Chronicle* while I was having breakfast," Jones said. He lit a cigarette, waved the pack at Bryce.

Bryce shook his head, took a Camel out of a humidor on the desk. "Damndest thing I ever heard!" he said. "Like he'd been yanked out of his clothes, but all of them, and made to disappear. Never showed up anywhere. We got it in a routine teletype. It would have stayed routine except that Norman, the lad we put on it, found some odd notes in Mason's wallet. A lot of names, nine of them. And heading the list was that of Mario Giarni!"

Bryce caught the startled look on Jones' face. He pointed the unlit cigarette at Jones. "Did you see Giarni last night?"

Jones told the other what had happened.

"Giarni didn't break down by chance and open up to you, did he?" Bryce asked.

"Sure! But there wasn't anything said about this Mason character."

BRYCE SHOOK his head, smiled ruefully. "Character is right. A real wrongo! The names on that list were all ex-cons. We've had some of them in. Mason was bleeding them, threatening to frame them if they didn't come across. Of course we're checking their whereabouts last night. Giarni's too."

"I know where he was from about midnight to twelve-thirty," Jones said.

"I'm not saying the little guy had anything to do with it. Routine, Jay. You should know how we operate. By the way, what did you want to see me about?"

"I want to see the man in charge of Bayshore Laboratory. Think you can fix it up?"

"I guess so. Why?"

"Local color. The scene-of-the-crime business. And maybe I can get some interesting sidelights. Oh, Bill. Did you know that Giarni's wife divorced him and married this Finchley?"

"Yes."

"Why the hell didn't you say so, then?"

Bryce lit the cigarette, grinned. "Two reasons. One: you didn't ask me. Two: you didn't want me to provide color."

"Well, excuse me all to pieces! I'll channel it next time. Friend Mario told me about it. I don't think he likes them."

Bryce looked at the clock on the wall, put his cigarette in a tray, picked up the phone and dialed a number. Presently a voice came on. He said: "Mr. Sanborn, please. Bryce of the F. B. S. calling."

Jones could hear the faint gruffness of a man's voice.

"...Fine, Tom," Bryce said after a second. "Tom, I'm sending a friend of mine down, fellow named Jones. ...No, not an agent. Writes fact detective articles. He's doing one on the Giarni case..." Bryce smiled into the phone, nodded a couple of times, went on: "Don't worry, Tom. He'll clear the story with me before he sends it in... Yes, that's right, we want to keep Finchley in the background. I know how important you think his work... After lunch? One o'clock. Right. Good deal. Thanks, Tom." He hung up, nodded to Jones. "You've got a date. Tom Sanborn likes his dates kept promptly. He's that kind of man." He looked at the clock once more. "Got to move along now, Jay. Sorry I can't chin any more. Let me know how you made out."

"I will," Jones promised. "You'll read it in the manuscript. So Finchley is the white-haired boy? That was

nice of you. I might have put my foot into it."

Bryce moved away from the desk, stopped to pat Jones' shoulder. "You'll have to use a light touch on Finchley. He's got a high priority rating."

THE GRIM grey walls of Bayshore Laboratory in South San Francisco were broken by north and south gates, huge affairs of iron bars and steel mesh. Uniformed guards stood at ease on the concrete safety lanes which divided the lines for auto and truck traffic into the grounds.

The guard put his head into the open window, asked Jones his business. Jones told him of the appointment he had. The guard withdrew his head, signalled to a hidden someone in the right-hand tower. The right-hand gate moved slowly inward.

"Please see the officer at the window just inside the gate, sir," the guard said.

Jones parked the Chevie along the curbing and reported to the officer, a Lieutenant of Marines. The Lieutenant called someone on a phone close to hand, hung up and said: "We'll have a guide here in a minute, sir. You can park in the lot next to the white post."

The guide proved to be a Marine sergeant in a jeep.

A few minutes later the Marine was escorting Jones to the Administration Building where Sanborn's office was. The receptionist at the switchboard waved Jones toward the walnut-panelled door which opened to the inner office.

It was just one o'clock.

SANBORN was a tall, bulky man, made more so by the pepper-and-salt tweeds he wore. He had a smooth-shaven face topped by a crew cut that took years from his age. He had a bluff, hearty manner and the voice of

a trained speaker. His eyes were blue, cold and calculating. His mouth was thin-lipped and small, the mouth of a quick thinker.

He shook hands quickly, gestured Jones toward a leather arm chair beside the wide, almost bare desk.

"Now then," he began. "Bryce didn't enlarge on what you wanted. How may we help you?"

"Give me the substance of Mario Giarni. I'll supply the shadow."

Sanborn leaned his elbows on the desk, placed his chin on folded fingers, and regarded the man opposite with level eyes. "You must realize," he said, "that even though all this happened six years ago some of the story can't be told. I think that's obvious. In the main, however, I think I can accede to your request. What exactly do you want to know about Giarni?"

Jones returned the level glance. He had an idea it was an act with Sanborn. "I'm not too interested in *what* Giarni sold. I can always say the information cannot be revealed. It's the *why* of the crime. You knew the principals. I know it isn't easy to bring back first impressions. By now they are vague and distorted. Hardened, too. Do you understand what I want, Mr. Sanborn?"

"I think I do," Sanborn said reflectively. He drew his lips inward. "I'll try not to wander, Mr. Jones. First off, know anything of Giarni's scientific accomplishments?"

Jones shook his head.

"Well, he was a first-rate scientist. The Haight-Marsden Tower was his brain child really. Haight and Marsden followed his theory to its successful conclusion. So we captured the cosmic rays and were able to screen them for practical purposes. The true importance of the tower lies in its transmitting. The cheapest power in

the Universe. Giarni had his share in its development.

"That was Mario Giarni, super-scientist. There was another side, however, a little-known side. Mario had pet notions. I call them notions because they were little more than that." Sanborn allowed himself a smile at the remembrance. "I suppose we all have them. But Mario insisted they had scientific worth. He claimed he could build a machine which could destroy by vibrations it emanated. Aside from its bad science it was bad thinking. If the thing could destroy by vibrations, what would prevent it from destroying the operator and everyone else, for that matter? Mario took a terrific ribbing from us. As I remember, Walter was the only one who didn't poke fun at him. . . ."

"Finchley. . . ?"

"**Y**ES. OF COURSE Walter had his reasons. Good ones, indeed. For one thing, Walter had been suspicious of Giarni. He knew he had to stay in his good graces so he pretended to follow the other. The second reason was a personal one, and more important to Walter. It seemed that Giarni had stolen an idea of Walter's and twisted it to make it fit his own premise. Fortunately, Walter got onto what Giarni was doing, so it all turned out well for him."

Jones decided to let that ride for the moment. "What sort of man was Giarni personally?"

"Very likeable. Certainly easy-going. He was, as they say, a very good-hearted man, a man who hated to hurt others."

"And he wanted to build a machine capable of destroying humanity?" Jones was astonished.

"Well, he didn't see it as such. He saw it only as a weapon if needed. His idea was to enable us to listen to

worlds beyond our means of sound identification. And he was right in this sense. If insects, let us say, have a means of communication, it is pitched in a scale of vibrations per second which would run into the hundreds of thousands. He said his machine could perform this miracle of permitting us to hear them. No, altogether Mario made too little sense in his theory. And the more he tried to proselytize, the more we laughed."

"Except Walter. He was busy playing bloodhound."

Sanborn flushed. He drummed on the desk with thick, spatulate fingers. "That remark was uncalled for."

"I apologize."

Sanborn nodded abruptly. "I shouldn't have made Finchley the exception. There was Mark Harley, the lab assistant. He worshipped Giarni. Was terribly upset by the arrest."

"Is he still with you?"

"No. I have his address, however." Sanborn had seen a way out of further prying. Jones was proving too inquisitive. Sanborn thought it would be the discreet thing to get rid of him. Harley could tell him anything he wanted; Sanborn could deny it if it was going to implicate Walter.

Jones jotted it down, felt a surge of elation. Sanborn was proving too cagey a bird. Perhaps there were things he didn't want brought to light. If Finchley was Sanborn's pet that would be reason enough. Jones decided not to wait looking up Mr. Harley.

Sanborn's expression of regret that the interview had to end on an unsatisfactory note didn't fool Jones. He knew Sanborn was glad to be rid of him.

THERE was no phone listed under the name Mark Harley. The address was in the Fillmore District, a rough neighborhood even in daylight.

It was a long ride from the laboratory but Jones was at a dead end. True, he could go to see Mrs. Finchley. But if Sanborn was Finchley's bird dog, Finchley already knew of Jones' visit and would have contacted his wife. No, better try Harley.

Jones parked the Chevie on Laguna just off the corner of Ellis and walked East, past the corner grocery, past a tavern, a curtained window on which hung a sign saying hands were being read inside, a recessed entranceway where a woman lounged. He stopped, peered into the gloom, trying to see the address. She smiled, said something he couldn't quite make out but could guess. He shook his head, went on. A basement tailor, another curtained window, without a sign this time, and another recessed entrance.

A weathered plaque above the entrance announced the Pacific Apartments, Number 1698.

He snapped his cigarette lighter, brought flame to the wick, bent to see the names on the mail boxes, saw the one he was looking for. Mark Hartley, room 132. He rang the bell below the box. Nothing. He rang again. Nothing. He shrugged, started to turn, thought to try the outside door.

It was open.

He walked down a hallway dim with light from a glassed opening in the roof two floors above. The room he wanted was the last on the right. He knocked.

Silence.

He put his hand on the knob and turned it. The door swung open. He blinked at the gloom, narrowed his glance. Straight ahead was a wide window whose shade was drawn to the sill. A chest of drawers broke the straight line of wall to his right. A door swung partly open almost at his left hand. Shoved against the left wall was a bed whose whiteness was dis-

figured by the shape sprawled on it.

Jones brushed his hands along the wood trim by the door. No switch. His eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, caught sight of the fixture hanging from the ceiling. He went forward gingerly, lifted his hand and felt a string. He pulled at it. White light burned fiercely from a hundred-and-fifty-watt lamp above.

HE STRODE to the bed, bent, and was assailed by a sharp alcoholic odor. The man on the bed was lying face down. His right hand trailed over the edge of the bed. Directly below it an empty pint of vodka gave the reason for the odor. Jones shook the shoulders with both hands. They were bony and limp. Jones heaved the body face up and stared at the unshaven, gaunt face.

It was not an old face, but bagged under the eyes, shadowed with the spectres of drunken dreams. There was a softness about the thin features now lax in unconsciousness that would be missing when awakening came. Jones straightened, looked about him.

There was a washstand in the corner between the chest and window. A dirty towel hung on a crossbar. Beside it an even dirtier washrag. Jones let the cold tap run until the water stung his hand with coldness, got the washrag dripping wet, and brought it to the now-snoring figure. He brought the washrag down on the man's mouth and nose and held it there for a second.

When the head moved he took the rag away and brought it over for another filling of the icy water. This time there was a muttering under the cloth when he applied it. And an instant later a hand came up violently and shoved at Jones' hand pressing the cloth on the face.

"Hey!" the voice was hoarse, thick.

"Let up, will ya? Wha's idea?"

"Get up, Hartley!" Jones said brusquely. He reached down, got a fistful of shirt and hauled the other to a sitting position.

Hartley's head moved loosely from side to side. He blinked in the harsh light. His mouth was slack and his breath came harshly between the loose lips. Presently he brought his gaze on the man before him, held it there.

"Who're you? How'd you get in?"

"Door was open," Jones said.

"So get out and I'll close it," the man said.

"In good time," Jones said. He turned, reached behind him and pulled a chair by the window over close to the bed and sat down. "That's better. Now..."

"Now nothin'!" Hartley growled thickly. "Get outa here! Go on."

"Sure. First we talk, though." He shoved Hartley back on the bed as the other started to get up. "Take it easy. You're in no condition to fight."

Hartley grinned loosely. "Who wantsa fight? Not me. I'm a lover. Got a gal who says so. Love and vodka. Who're you?"

"The name's Jones. I'm a friend of Mario Giarni's. I hear you were a friend of his too."

The name seemed to hold little interest for Hartley. If anything, his jaws became more slack, his eyes even more lack-lustre.

"Mario Giarni!" Jones said sharply. "Remember? You were his assistant at Bayshore."

QUITE SUDDENLY tears formed in Hartley's eyes, rolled down the unshaven cheeks. "Mario. Sure. What a swell little guy. An' what a bum they made outa him," Hartley muttered brokenly. More tears fell. "What a bum they made outa him," he reiterated.

"Who?" Jones demanded. He felt he was on the verge of something important.

But the answer didn't come. Hartley fell into a drunken sobbing and muttering in which the only thing that made sense was the same sentence: "...What a bum they made outa him..."

Jones pounded a fist in a palm and looked around for something that would sober Hartley up. There was nothing in the room to do the trick. He went back to the cold-rag routine. Hartley put up a struggle but it was weak at its best, and after a while he let Jones do what he wanted with him.

When it was all over Hartley was almost sober. He was more cooperative when drunk. He sat with head down, peering narrowly at Jones from under lowered lids. His mouth trembled and his fingers on the grey sheet were in constant movement.

"I need a drink," Hartley said.

"I'll buy you a damned distillery!" Jones said. "Just tell me about Mario Giarni. What made you say they made a bum out of him? And who are *they*?"

"I don't know what you're talkin' about," Hartley said sullenly.

Jones reached into his pocket, pulled a ten-dollar bill from it. "There's a couple of fifths of vodka in this, Hartley. Just answer my questions."

Hartley licked his lips, eyes centered on the green paper.

"Well?"

"Okay. Look. I ain't in condition to get it myself. There's a tavern next to the corner. Get me a fifth, will you, mister? I'll talk easier when I got a drink in me."

It was a toss-up. But Jones felt he had little choice. A single drink might sober Hartley up. Or get him drunk

all over again. He decided to chance it.

HARTLEY fumbled the wrapping off the bottle, put it to his lips and took a deep swallow. "Ah! That's better." He took another swallow, a short one, and screwed the cap on and put the bottle at his feet. His red-rimmed eyes were steady on Jones. "You were asking about Mario. What do you want to know?"

"Was he framed?"

"I don't know," Hartley said. "Finchley hated his guts. So did Mario's wife. And Finchley and Mrs. Giarni were playing footsie for a long time. They sent Mario up but for my money he was a right guy."

"What did you do as a laboratory assistant?" Jones asked.

"Sober, I'm a whiz with a camera. Even drunk I can take better shots than most guys sober. There was a lot of camera work in Mario's experiments. Of course when he was sent away Finchley found an excuse to get rid of me."

Jones began a measured pacing. The man on the bed eyed him curiously.

"Say! Why are you so interested?" Hartley asked.

Jones told him. "...What's more I smell a lot of fish in this. Especially after Sanborn told me Giarni stole Finchley's idea."

Hartley choked laughter out of his throat. He started to reach for the bottle, changed his mind. "That fake never had an idea in his life. He and the dame stole Mario's ideas...."

"How do you know?"

"Mario liked me. Used to get a kick out of the way I talked. Maybe he suspected Finchley and his wife. I don't know. Anyhow, Mario told me one day what a fine wife he had. He used to do his notes in longhand. He thought she was doing him a favor by

typing them up for him at his house. I'll lay six, two, and even all those papers wound up in Finchley's pocket."

"But we can't prove it," Jones said.

"No? Maybe you're right."

Jones cocked his head, let the words sink in. "You mean you know I'm wrong? How?"

"What the hell good would it do? They'd say I faked them, stole them from Finchley. I made microfilm copies of everything Mario wrote. I begged him to let me use them at the trial. He said he didn't want me to. He wouldn't believe she would put a finger on him. So she fixed his wagon, but good."

"You still have that film?" Jones held his breath.

"Yeah. But like I said, what good will it do? They'll call me a bum and say I got hold of papers belonging to Finchley and filmed them."

"In Mario Giarni's handwriting? Don't be stupid! I can get that film printed in the text of my story. We can break this thing if you'll cooperate!"

"I said I liked Mario. You tell me when and I'll bring the stuff."

"It's a deal. I've got to see Bill Bryce of the F. B. S. first to get some information. Then I'll contact you. Take it easy on the jug, will you Hartley?"

"I won't promise that. But I'll be here when you want me."

Jones had to be satisfied with that.

THE AFTERNOON fog was drifting in. A solid grey bank of it hung low on the Western horizon. But downtown San Francisco was still bathed in sunlight. Jones parked the car on Larkin and walked the couple of blocks to the Federal Building. The weariness he had felt on finding Hartley drunk was dissipated in the start-

ing news the ex-assistant had given him.

If only Bill Bryce was in.

He was, but too busy to see Jones. "I've got to see Mr. Bryce!" Jones snarled.

The receptionist smiled wearily. "Sorry, sir, but Mr. Bryce gave strict orders he was not to be disturbed."

"Give him a ring, anyway. Tell him J. Jones is waiting to see him with something he's got to know."

She sighed, plugged in to Bryce's phone and said something in a low voice. She looked up, said: "I told you, sir. He doesn't want—"

Jones vaulted the low barrier, spoke into the switchboard mouthpiece: "Bill. I've got tremendous news. It'll take a minute. I promise it won't be longer." He could feel Bryce's hesitancy.

"Okay, J., but not more than a minute."

Bryce had his hat in hand and was wearing a topcoat. "You caught me at a bad time, Jay. Can't it keep?"

"Bill, I think I can prove Giarni's innocence. Just tell me what Walter Finchley is working on at Bayshore."

"Sorry. No can do." Bryce took a couple of steps toward the door.

Jones grabbed the sleeve of the coat. "Hold it, Bill. This is important! What is this secret deal Finchley is on?"

Bryce frowned. "Damn it, J. There are times— Okay! Finchley is working on a gun which can emit destructive vibrations."

Jones' eyes lit with glee. "That breaks it! No wonder Sanborn tried to steer me away. They all laughed at Mario Giarni. Then they stole in, grabbed his ideas and threw him in the pokey. His wife, his coworker and his boss. Nice people. You can go now, Bill. Thanks muchly. I won't

bother you any more. Not until I get the story typed."

"You mean you can prove Giarni had this thing in mind first?"

"Even to your satisfaction."

"Bring it to me when you get hold of it. The Government doesn't approve of obstruction to justice. Or juggling of confidential matters. But I can't stay any longer. The police lab boys want me to come down and look at something they found in the Mason business."

"I'll go out with you," Jones said, taking the other's arm.

"Where are you bound for?" Bryce asked as he opened the door to his car. "Maybe I can give you a lift?"

"I'm parked down the street. Thanks. I'm going to see friend Mario. Be in later?"

"Uh hunh. About seven. Maybe we'll have a drink or two together."

"I'll keep it in mind," Jones said. He waved the other off, turned and strode toward Larkin Street.

THE DESK clerk looked in the box, didn't see the key and told Jones to go up. The hall smelled of disinfectant. Jones rapped at the door and turned the knob at the sound of a voice within.

Giarni was stretched full length on the bed. The small accordion lay on a chair beside the bed. Giarni was fully dressed except for shoes and jacket. His eyes were almost closed. Jones got the feeling the little man was looking at him from under those leaden lids.

"Mario," Jones said gently. "No games today, huh? I've got news for you."

Mario blinked his eyes, yawned.

"I saw Mark Hartley about an hour ago. He told me about the microfilm copies he made. He's still got them."

Giarni opened his eyes, looked up

at the ceiling. "He was a nice boy, Mark. Told you about the filmed copies he made? He wanted me to use them at the trial."

"Why didn't you?"

Giarni sat up and shoved himself to the side of the bed, reached down and put his shoes on. Granules of sand fell to the floor. He went past Jones to the wall closet and got out his jacket and put it on.

Jones' eyes were fixed on the particles of sand which had dropped from the soles of the shoes. He spoke without looking at the other: "You could fix Finchley and your ex-wife pretty good, you know."

Giarni's smile was gently introspective. "I'll take care of them in my own way."

Jones turned, stepped up to Giarni, blocked him from the door. "That won't be smart. My idea is much better. The whole world will know of your framing."

"To hell with the world!" Giarni said. "When I needed friends the only one who showed up was a drunken photographer. I'm my own friend. I thought I told you last night to leave me alone."

The sand bothered Jones. "By the way, Mario, where did you go after I left?"

"For a guy who isn't a cop you're kind of nosy. I came back here, couldn't sleep, went back out, walked the streets till about two-thirty. You can check with the night man."

"The story better be right," Jones said. "A guy named Mason is missing. Your name was on a list he had. Mason was a wrong cop. Know him?"

"Look, mister," Giarni sidled to the bed, took the accordion from the chair and slipped it over his shoulder. "If you want to ask official questions you'd better get a badge."

Jones heaved his shoulders. Giarni

wasn't making things easy for himself. Of course the guy was mixed up. If there was a way to get him unmixed?

"Mario. How about dinner with me?"

The little man paused, hesitated an instant. "That's kind of you," he said. The words were not the sort he usually used. "It isn't an easy thing to live alone with only your thoughts for company." He looked down at the accordion. "My little music box. Some day great music will come out of it."

"They tell me you were a great scientist. Some day you will go back to being that again," Jones said gently. "Come on. I could go for a double porterhouse tonight."

GIARNI SIGHED, wiped his lips and said: "That did me a lot of good. Thank you."

Jones lit a cigarette, offered one to Giarni. He glanced at the clock over the cashier's cage. It lacked a half hour of seven. His voice and manner were casual: "Mario, tell me about your wife. I would like to know all I can about a woman who did what she did."

Giarni blew smoke at the ceiling. His eyes became veiled, his voice caressing: "Jean? She had one love, money. Money could get her anything she wanted. I could never give her enough of it. But she stuck to me because she had the hope that some day I would provide enough of it. Then Walter Finchley came along.

"Walter was everything I wasn't, except scientist. He'll never be that. But he was big, bluff, hearty. And his love of money equalled hers. It doesn't matter now, Jones. Believe me. I don't hate them any more, though I once did. You'll never know how much. Like when she got up on the stand and lied. God how she lied! Knowing eve-

ry word she uttered was a dagger in my back. And her eyes smiled down at me from the stand, as though she were saying, you fool! Now I'll have money. Walter and I saw to that."

Jones drew back from the naked look of hatred in Giarni's eyes. The look was frightening. It told him Giarni's hate was a live thing. Giarni lied. He hadn't forgotten, would never forget.

"It was easy what they did. Too easy. I believed her as though she were the living Bible. I brought the papers I sweated over to her like a dutiful husband bringing home his paycheck. And she would type them out and put them away for me. After she destroyed the written originals. Put them away for me, where only Walter could get at them. It was a fine game they played with me. Walter was no great physicist but he was enough of one to know he could put the things I wrote to good use. If only they had waited. But if they had I would never have figured it out. It took six years of prison." He looked up suddenly with a blank stare. His hand came down on the table, making the crockery jump. "So you got it out of me!"

"Easy, Mario. It's what I wanted, the low-down on Finchley and your ex-wife. You've given it to me. Don't stop."

"Maybe you're right. It feels good to get it out. My friend Walter. Making me out to be a fool while he stole my wife and the work I'd sweated years over. What a damn fool I was. Even to the end I thought her true to me. True— It was she who called the F. B. S. and told them she had heard me making the appointment to meet this man—that she saw me putting the papers in the brief case. The cheap fake! The two of them framed me, and I was caught in the very act.

But I thought I was helping Walter out. It was he who asked me to meet this man, it was he who put the papers in the bag, said they were something he had forgotten about, and would I bring them to this man at the hotel.

"And the courtroom full of people. There wasn't a single one who believed me. Not one! I got to hate the world then. Every mother's son. Hartley begged me to let him show the microfilm he made. But I wouldn't, not even after Jean and Walter testified. You see, with all their conniving they didn't get what they wanted. Well, I served my years. Now I'm free. Free to do what I want. Jones, the whole world will know Mario Giarni. I'll see to that."

Jones looked at the clock again. Fifteen to seven. "Mario, will you come and see Bill Bryce? I'm going there now. Come along and tell him your story."

"I said it was too late. Thanks for the dinner. I've got to go and make music now," Giarni patted the accordion. "I know this won't betray me."

"I'm not going to let up on you, Mario. Where will you be at ten? Let's meet at the Copra Hut. Tell you what. I'll bring Hartley. It'll do you good to see him again. He thought the world of you, and still does. I think it broke him up when they sent you away."

A far away look softened the dark eyes. But only for an instant. "Poor Hartley," Giarni said. "I won't say I'll be there. Maybe—"

And once more Jones had to be satisfied with an unsatisfactory ending.

BILL BRYCE looked dragged out.

There were deep circles under his eyes. He kept tapping the end of the cigarette in the tray as though he weren't sure he had flicked off the last of the ash. He kept watching J. Jones,

whose set face held lines of despair and horror.

"I shouldn't have left him alone!" Jones said for the tenth time. "I knew it. I shouldn't have—"

"It wasn't your fault," Bryce said wearily. He crushed out the cigarette, lit another. "How the hell were you to know?"

"That's no good! And it's no excuse. He's dead, but I might have saved him."

Bryce shook his head, sighed: "Don't worry, J. We'll nail whoever did it. They made a couple of mistakes. Burning the microfilm for one. It left identifiable ashes. Hartley had it out on the chest. It had to be someone who knew about the film. It had to be someone who knew Hartley to get that close to stab him to death. There was no struggle."

"Yeah," Jones said sharply. "Sanborn knew I was going to see him...."

"Friend Sanborn is being brought down," Bryce said. "One thing we're sure of. Giarni didn't do it."

"Couldn't have. We were together all the time."

Bryce said, "I didn't have time to tell you but we made some odd discoveries this afternoon. That was why I had to dash off. Our men found out what the dust was that was on Mason's clothes. Cosmic dust. Billions of particles of cosmic dust! And that isn't all. You know the channel between Seal Rocks and the shore? There were thousands of dead fish floating there today. And not a seal on the rocks. Some smart guy thought to call the lab in on it and guess what they found on those dead fish?"

"Cosmic dust?"

"Right. They were coated with it."

"Which means what?"

"I called Sanborn from the laboratory. That was before Hartley's body

was discovered. He stuttered and said he couldn't believe it. It just wasn't possible. To send him some of the dust for analysis. But when I pinned him down he had to admit the truth. Someone had arrived at the goal they were seeking at the laboratory. Someone had built a gun that kills by vibration. And the only one we can think of is Mario Giarni."

"Mario! He said he might be at the Copra Hut at ten to meet Hartley and me. What's the time?"

"Nine-thirty. I've already got an alarm out on him. Let's go. We'll take a couple of my boys along, just in case."

THE LITTLE man with the shock of greying hair ordered a glass of beer and a ham sandwich from the bartender. He slipped the small accordion from his shoulder and held it on his lap. He smiled gently at his reflected image. The nine o'clock news was blaring loudly from the radio.

"—Democratic Governor Hebird of Utah is demanding a Government investigation of the irrigation program. His voice is just another in the series of outcries against graft in the Governmental agencies. The Democrats are going to make hay out of it. It's their first chance to get even for what the Republicans did to them ten years ago... *Flash!* There's been another murder in the Fillmore District. The body of an unemployed photographer, Mark Hartley, was found in his apartment early this evening. Hartley had been stabbed to death. This makes the sixth murder...."

The rest was just noise to the little man. His eyes were blind in shock. Light flashed from them, the baleful light of mad hatred. His mouth made inaudible sounds.... "So they got to Mark. Now it's murder. They can't go

on living. It isn't right. No. I must stop them—"

He tossed a dollar on the bar and went swiftly out into the night, a small figure in a dark brown suit and shirt.

Bryce gave short sharp orders: "I want him alive if possible. But don't take chances. He's a killer. All right, let's go."

The five men converged on the Copra Hut.

The customers looked frightened, the bartender startled and worried. Feds. It wasn't good for business. No, he hadn't seen the little guy who played the accordion. Not tonight. Maybe he was in one of the other bars.

"What now?" Jones asked.

"Wait. Nothing else we can do. There's an alarm out on him. I hoped we'd pick him up here."

"How about trying the Howard Arms?"

"It's already staked out. No, we'll wait here for fifteen minutes."

Bryce's men went out to the car. Jones ordered drinks for himself and Bryce. The minutes crawled by. Suddenly the door swung open and one of Bryce's men ran to their booth.

"We just got a report on the car phone. They've got Sanborn down at headquarters. He called the Finchleys from there and they told him they had heard from Giarni. He called them a little after nine, said he was coming to see them."

Bryce looked at his watch. Quarter to ten. The Finchleys lived in St. Francis Woods a long way from downtown San Francisco. If Giarni took a bus, which was the most reasonable assumption, it would take him all of an hour to get there. There was a chance they could beat him to it.

"Let's go!" Bryce said.

Their shrieking siren blazed a path for them. It even picked up a couple

of police motorcycles as escorts. At times they went a hundred miles an hour. Still it took twenty minutes to reach the Finchley residence, a two-story Georgian-style home set beyond a couple of hundred feet of well-kept lawn. The bureau car skidded to a halt. Bryce, followed closely by Jones, was the first at the door.

A frightened maid answered their ring. No, the Finchleys weren't home. They had left shortly after nine. No, she didn't know where they went.

BRYCE asked if Giarni had showed up.

"There was a little man with an accordion," she answered. "He didn't give his name. He scared me. He acted crazy. Especially when I told him the folks weren't home. He laughed crazy-like and said, 'I'll get them if I have to kill everyone in San Francisco.' I was afraid to answer the door now. I thought..."

"How long ago was this?" Bryce broke in.

"About ten minutes ago."

"Ten minutes! He can't be far off. Harry, did you call for reinforcements?"

"Yes, sir. Melville at headquarters told me he was sending four cars."

"Good. Send this out. Giarni is headed back to town. Stop all transportation, cabs, cars and buses and search them. I want him alive if it can be done."

"What do we do?" Jones asked.

"There's a bus line comes out this way. I forget the street. We'll drive slowly, maybe spot him."

They didn't have far to go. The wide curving tree-shaded streets were dimly lit and the small figure stood out with startling clarity. One of the motorcyclists turned his wheel inward toward the sidewalk and started for Giarni.

As though warned by a sixth sense, Giarni whirled, saw the policeman, turned and ran into the shelter of a parkway.

Bryce shouted an order to the chauffeur, and piled out of the car even before it stopped. Nor was Jones far behind. Ahead, they could hear the man on the bike shouting for Giarni to halt. Suddenly, the sound of his voice was no longer heard. They saw the reason why a moment later. One of the men stumbled over the bike lying on its side. And beside it a crumpled heap of blue clothing, a pair of leather puttees and a pair of black shoes. When one of the Federal men touched the clothes dust rose on the air.

They gathered in wondering silence around all that remained of a human being.

"Damn them!" Jones burst out. "Damn them to hell! I hope he gets them."

"No, you don't hope that. No matter what the Finchleys have done killing them won't straighten things. Besides, I have an idea they'll pay our way. But let's forget them now. Giarni. He's crazed. And he's got a weapon that could kill everyone in San Francisco. We've got to stop him somehow."

"Gettin' foggy," one of the men remarked. "Gonna make things rough."

"Just as rough on him," Bryce said. "He can't see us either."

"Hold it a minute, Bill," Jones said. "I don't want to waste words or time. Let me go after him alone. He trusts me, I think. He'll listen to reason. If you send the men after him there'll be more killing."

"No, J. I can't take the responsibility of losing him."

"Then I'll take it myself."

Before they could stop him he ran

swiftly forward and disappeared among the trees. But they could hear him calling: "Mario. Mario, it's me—Jones. Wait up, man..."

THE FOG and the dark closed in on him. He shouted Mario's name, waiting a second for a response, then trotted on. He knew it was a small parkway; St. Francis Woods was too small an area for large parks. Soon he must come to the end of it.

"Mario!" he shouted again. "Wait for me! It's Jones."

And suddenly, as though the little figure were a spectre rising from the mists, Mario stood before him ten feet off. "That's far enough, mister," Mario said.

Jones paused, collected his thoughts, marshalled them together. The fate of many people depended on his ability to convince Mario of the terrible thing he was planning to do. "I'll stay put, Mario," he said. "I just want you to listen to me."

"You talk too much. I'm tired of listening. Now I'm going to settle things in my way." Giarni laughed. It was a sound that struck terror in Jones. For there was madness in its high note. "I won't have to find Jean and Walter. Not with my little gun. It can go through steel and concrete. It will find them in the deepest cave. All I have to do is wave it around..."

"Think of the innocent people who'll die, Mario," Jones begged. He slid forward a step. Another. Paused as Mario lifted the muzzle slightly.

"Nobody's innocent. They said I was guilty. Let them get out of the way."

Jones calculated the distance. Too far. It would take another three feet. He took another step and again. Now he said: "Mario. There are twenty men surrounding this place. You can't get them all."

Giarni did what Jones expected him to, look to either side. In that second Jones made his move—a swift two steps forward and a diving tackle that caught Giarni above the knees and took him backward.

The little man was like one insane. He clubbed downward with the metal tube, clawed at Jones' face with his free hand, used his knee, spat like a cat. But Jones had his face buried against Giarni's chest while he held him close with one arm. The metal tube crashed against his skull once and a wave of blackness through his brain. He held on to Giarni with all his strength, wrestling him from side to side, trying to get his head out of the way of more blows.

A bony knee caught him in the groin, turning his body to water. He looked up, saw the twisted, tortured face close to his, saw the eyes blazing in animal madness, and knew he had to kill or be killed.

HE MARSHALLED his waning strength and lifted himself straight up, bringing the little man with him. When he was erect he brought his knee up into the pit of Giarni's stomach. The little man moaned and went limp. Jones staggered back two steps and looked down at the other.

His jaw went slack and fear rode an icy furrow down his belly, twisting it into a frozen knot. Giarni was crawling away from him but the tube was pointing straight at him. And he could see Giarni's thumb on the switch at

the side.

"Mario! Don't. I'm your friend."

He never knew what it was. He liked to think it was the word, "Friend." Mario had said he had none. But at the words, Mario sat up, looked at Jones, smiled and turned the tube on himself and thumbed the switch. And suddenly there was nothing of Mario. Just an empty bundle of clothes....

Jones knuckled his eyes and yawned widely. Bill Bryce drained the last of the coffee and leaned back in the chair. The light of another day, one without fog, was breaking over San Francisco. A tall, thin man came into the office. He carried a thin sheaf of papers in his hand.

"All done, Thurston?" Bryce asked.

"Yes, sir. The whole confession. You were right, sir. It was the woman who broke. Of course Melville did a good job of acting, telling her Finchley implicated her in the Giarni case. I thought she'd bust a gut screaming. But we got what we wanted. Finchley confessed when we brought her in to face him. A pretty shabby couple, those two."

Thurston went out after leaving the papers on the desk.

There was a minute's silence.

"I guess Mario is happy about it, too," Jones said. "Wherever he is. There'll never be anyone who'll laugh at him any more. I wonder if he..."

"Yes..." Bryce asked curiously.

"I wonder if he has an accordion where he is? One that can only play the "Skater's Waltz"..."

THE END

Terrific!

"THE MAD MONSTERS OF MOGO"

By Don Wilcox

READ IT IN THE

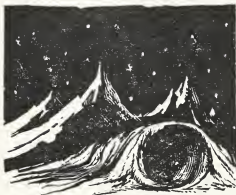
NOVEMBER

AMAZING STORIES

MOON TUNNEL

By

E. Bruce Yaches



A SHOVEL and a pair of strong arms could probably find a ready-made tunnel to dig in on the moon, where latest reports suggest that it is quite possible that a tunnel several miles long—probably lined with glass walls—exists. This could have been formed by a meteor which passed through the top part of one of the moon's mountain ridges.

According to Dr. H. H. Nininger of the American Meteorite Museum, in Arizona, meteorites have been bombarding the moon for centuries, so that now it is probably covered by a very deep mantle of light cindery rubble.

The powdery dust would be vaporized on contact by a meteorite moving 20 to 30 miles per second, and the material lying just beyond the vaporized layer would melt and cool quickly, thus forming a glazed cylinder.

Enormous holes would mark the entrance and exit of such a meteorite as it went across the moon's surface and tunneled its way through the dust covering on the moon until it struck the solid ground underneath. Eventually, it would burn its way out.

According to Dr. Nininger, two holes similar to those described above have been classified as craters. They are located on the western part of the moon, and differ from other types of craters. One of the most important points of their difference from other craters is that they are located on opposite sides of a mountain ridge several thousand feet high and about 15 to 20 miles wide, and from the shape of the holes it is quite possible that a large meteorite did force its way through as described in the opening of this article.

STARS FOR WISHING

By Leo Lewin

THOSE OF us who really believe that wishes made on shooting stars come true, will enjoy noting that billions of shooting stars speed into the earth's atmosphere each day, at the rate of 50 miles per second. They're fired by friction and consumed to dust in a matter of moments. Most of them flash so faintly they're not even noticed, except perhaps through a telescope. A few light the planet Earth by their sudden flamboyant passing, then either disappear or burst about 40 miles over the Earth, leaving a luminous phosphorescent train in their wake.

Only once in a great while does one of these giant stars land and drop meteorites. There are a few historical monuments to commemorate these landings. One is the Arizona Meteor Crater which, when it fell, formed one of the biggest natural shell holes in the world. Historians are still trying to solve the mystery of when it fell, and geologists are still working at trying to dig out the meteorite. So far search has gone 1,200 feet beneath the surface of the crater.

The largest meteorite yet found was removed from Greenland. Admiral Robert Peary brought it to the Hayden Planetarium, in New York City, where it is a daily wonder to visitors.

THE

MOVING LAND

NEXT TIME you're sunning yourself and you think you see the entire beach rise up and move and then settle itself, you're not imagining anything. But don't get frightened. It's most probably only a swarm of mole crabs out for their daily snack.

These inch-sized creatures move up and down the beach according to the tide, burying themselves in the sloping wet sands. The microscopic sea life which furnishes his nutrition is pulled from the water by the crab's long antennae. When an entire migration of these tiny mole crabs swarms over the beach in a search for food, the illusion of a moving beach is most effective, and has probably sent more than one human swimmer home regretting last night's party.

Edies Keech



Desperately, the two men sought to save the strangling girl



HE PLAYED WITH DOLLS

By William P. McGivern

Gods of vengeance stalked the jungle. Strange and terrible gods. Could they be controlled by such a simple thing as a small rag doll?

TO BEGIN with, although it may not be the right place to begin, Swain was a rotter. A real cad, I marked him. I've knocked around enough in odd parts of the world to learn something of men, and I wasn't fooled by his smile, and his good manners, and his worldly talk of wine and food and music. He was the sort of devil who could be an angel at a dinner party, and then go home and cane his native boy within an inch of his life for not having done his boots properly.

I'd taken him on because I needed a man. It was as simple as that. Now I was praying I could get the work finished, and get rid of Swain before he brought trouble down on all of us. I'm a Canadian, working for an

American Oil company, in Africa at the present. The big men in New York are thinking about a pipeline from the interior to the Mediterranean, and after they get my reports they'll make up their minds. By then I'll be off in Colombia, or Iran, most likely, but that's my job.

There were the four of us whites here now: Swain, myself, Claude Diggers, our geologist, and his wife, Shelly. Diggers was a frail, middle-aged fellow with a bad stomach and a worse disposition, but his wife was about twenty-five, and was as out of place in a jungle outpost as I would be sitting around some swank hotel. I think she'd been in show business, or something like that, although she never said one way or the other. She

had every pale skin, almost transparent, and blonde hair, and very wide, deep blue eyes.

On this afternoon—and I guess this is the place to begin—Swain and I were sitting on the veranda of my house. It was that hour before darkness, when the black weight of the jungle is crouching just outside the compound. In a few minutes it would spring at us, and smother us completely. But right now there was a gray, pearly light coming through the trees, and the heat—the real burning heat, that is—was letting up a bit. We were dusty and hot from our day's work. I was enjoying the quiet of the moment, but Stone was fidgety. He was working on a double gin, and there was a moody expression on his thin, well-shaped face.

"God, what a hole," he said, in a tone of vast disgust. He waved a hand to include the small compound, the Diggers' house and his own, and the rows of thatched native huts. "What an absolute dead end for a white man."

"Well, it's our job," I said.

"Stinking job, I call it."

"It will be finished soon." I didn't want to quarrel with him; I wanted the job done, and done right, and then good-by to Mr. Swain.

Shelly Diggers came onto the veranda of her house and down the steps to the compound. She saw us and waved. Stone raised his drink to her and smiled. "Join us?" he called.

"No, thank you, I'm going to take a short walk," she said. "I'll see you at dinner."

"Righto," Swain said, grinning.

SHELLEY WAVED a good-by to us and moved across the compound toward the trail that led into the jungle. She wore a white sharkskin

dress and tiny high-heeled white pumps, and twirled a parasol above her shining blonde head. I wondered if she realized how disturbingly female and fragile she looked in that outfit. I decided she did.

Old Mary ambled into the compound just then and slunk over toward my house. She was about fifty years older than Africa, a dried-up, rheumatic bundle of a woman, with a face as creased and withered as an old prune, and milky, diseased eyes that were almost lost in the folds of her sagging flesh. Old Mary was enough to scare a Royal Guardsman in broad daylight, but I knew and liked her pretty well. She was like Africa, itself: a strange blend of foolishness and wisdom, of childish high spirits, and something else too dark and alien for a white man ever to comprehend. I treated her with cautious, friendly respect.

We greeted each other rather formally. She sold charms to the natives, and was eager to add me to her customers. I told her politely that I had no need of her medicine at the moment, but would come to her when I required her help. She thanked me and held out her hand. I tossed her a few coins which fell into the dust. Cackling, she scooped them up in a withered claw with a gesture that reminded me of a chicken pecking corn from the ground.

Swain finished his drink, and flashed one of his lazy, charming smiles at me. "I might use one of her love potions, you know," he said, and stared off toward the trail where Shelly Diggers had disappeared.

This was the trouble I feared, of course. The oldest kind in the world. It's not so bad in Casablanca, or Delhi, but out in the jungle it's an

explosive thing that sets off a string of deadly chain reactions. Superstitious? Well, perhaps I am. What's the difference between a man and woman breaking that old tribal law in a big, Westernized city, and out here in the jungle? Logically, there's no difference. But I know what I know, and it's knowledge that can't be squeezed into a neat equation.

I didn't know what to say to Swain. Sometimes there's nothing to say, or rather there's no good in saying it. I could have said: "Listen! Don't be a fool! You run off with her, and Diggers will follow and shoot both of you. Or if he says good riddance, you're outcasts who'll have trouble fitting into society again. The word spreads. The woman may get sick of it and chuck you, or you may get bored with it and walk out. Anyway, it's no good. Stick to liquor, and wait for leave."

The trouble is, you say that to a man, and he smiles and will probably reply, "Yes, but look at the way the wind curls the hair around her ears."

So there's nothing to be done. Not with men like Swain. You can only hope and pray and keep yourself clear of the explosion.

WE HAD dinner, the four of us, at Digger's that night. It was a quiet meal eaten in candlelight. The food was very good, roast wild pig with canned pineapple, and Digger treated us to a couple of bottles of his good Burgundy. He and I talked about the work to fill in the pauses. Diggers knew his stuff, but he was dry as dust about it. His voice was high, and his manner was precise and careful, like a teacher's. Watching him as he sat at the head of the table, the candle-light blinking on his glasses, I couldn't help feel a little sorry for

his wife. She was young, attractive, and she wanted fun. Probably got very little of it from Diggers, I thought. She sat opposite Swain, who was turned out elegantly in a white linen suit with a black tie, and occasionally their eyes met in a long, slow look across the sputtering candles. I wondered if Diggers noticed.

We had our coffee and brandy in the living room. It had begun to rain, a sluicing, drenching rain that crashed onto the tin roof with a noise like thunder. Occasionally a vivid streak of lightning tore the blackness. The jungle was close to us then, crowding us and compressing our needs and passions into the tiny lighted square of the living room.

Shelly and Swain sat together on the sofa, and after a little teasing she persuaded him to let her tell his fortune. They made a pleasant picture together, as they talked and laughed about it. Shelly traced the lines in his hand with a slender finger, and told him preposterous stories of what lay ahead in the future. Swain's free hand, hidden by the angle of his body from Digger, was gently touching the small of her back.

I wondered if Diggers was a fool. Maybe he didn't care. He answered my unspoken questions a moment later in a positive fashion. Taking a rifle from the mantle, he sat down and began dusting it with an oily rag. He said nothing at all, and seemed completely engrossed in his work.

"Going hunting?" I asked him.

"No," he said. He smiled at me, and the light struck his glasses and transformed his eyes into bright, inanimate discs. "No, but I thought I heard someone moving about in back of the house last night," he said.

Shelly released Swain's hand.

Diggers continued to smile at me. "That's where Shelly's room is, you know, and I don't want one of these thieving natives giving her a scare."

"I didn't hear anything," Shelly said. She had put her hands together in her lap, and Swain was busy lighting a cigarette. His fingers were trembling slightly.

"Well, perhaps it was my imagination," Diggers said.

"Might have been an animal," Swain said.

"Yes, I thought of that," Diggers said. "There are rats about, you know."

THAT WAS about as blunt as he could get. He knew, of course, and he was serving notice that he wasn't going to let his home be invaded. "I'll just sit up a few nights," he said. "You never can tell, I might bag something."

Half an hour later, he excused himself and went up to his room, after hearing me propose to Swain that we take our leave. When he had gone, I went into the vestibule to get my helmet and slicker. Coming back, I heard Swain and Shelly talking together in low, urgent whispers.

"I can't wait, I tell you I can't." That was Swain's voice.

"But we must. It's impossible. Not while he's here. You heard him." That was Shelly and her voice was raw and savage with passion.

"There must be a way."

"Then think of one. You're a man. Do something."

I walked back down the hallway half a dozen feet, and then returned, making sure that my footsteps sounded loudly. When I entered the room Shelly was sitting on the sofa, and Swain was examining a shelf of books.

"All ready?" I said.

"Ah, there you are! Righto."

It was a sad business all around.

We said our good-byes and left. I asked Swain if he wanted a nightcap, but he said no, very ungraciously, and sloshed off to his own house. The devils were in him now, eating at his vitals.

I settled down with a book, a good strong whisky-and-soda. It's a funny thing, you can either make peace with an outpost or fight it. I've learned to make peace with things. I take a book and a drink and relax, and after a bit the things that drive others mad—the silence, the rain, the menacing circle of the jungle—those things get to seem friendly to me. Now, listening to the hammering rain, and feeling the great black depth of the jungles around me, I felt oddly at peace.

Suddenly, I saw a flash of light across the compound from Swain's house. The door opened and his boy was silhouetted against the inner illumination. In a twinkling the boy shot down the steps, the door closed, and the blackness settled in again. Now what's this? I thought. Where's Swain sending the boy at this time of night? I couldn't get an answer to that one. But I felt worried and anxious again. I couldn't get back to my book, so I put it aside and watched the dark, empty compound.

The boy returned about half an hour later. He wasn't alone this time. There was someone with him, a mishapen old bundle of a human being, and I saw her clearly for an instant as she lurched and hobbled up the steps and disappeared into Swain's house.

It was Old Mary, and for some reason this development upset me more than anything else. What did Swain want of Old Mary? The only logical answer to that question was

far too disturbing to contemplate.

THE NEXT day Swain seemed in a cheerful mood. He asked me if he could take a crew out toward Ufizzi, which was an area we hadn't covered yet. There was nothing to say but yes. The work had to be done, and Swain's suggestion was a completely normal one. However, I wished to the devil I could have said no; Ufizzi was the village where Old Mary lived. Why should that worry me? I didn't have the answer to that question. All I knew was that I was worried. . . .

Swain worked hard that week, leaving camp at daybreak with an eight-man crew, and not returning until it was nearly dark. He seemed in a better mood, and this puzzled me. Before he'd been tense and irritable, but now he was different, more relaxed it appeared. We followed our usual routine at the camp, all of us dining together at my place, or the Diggers', and having a few drinks before bedtime. To my relief the situation between Swain and Shelly Diggers seemed to have quieted down. There was something funny about it, though, I felt. Swain treated her more casually, more easily. He didn't seem to be suffering from just being near her. Shelly didn't like it, I knew. Maybe he'd come to his senses, and was letting her down gently. Maybe he was afraid of Diggers' straight-shooting rifle. At any rate, for whatever reason, Swain had changed his manner toward her, and this development left her puzzled and annoyed.

After Swain had put in ten days in the area about Ufizzi, I told him that was enough, and sent him off in another direction. He was perfectly agreeable. I waited until he'd cleared camp by an hour, and then, because I

couldn't fight down the feeling that was growing in me, I slung a rifle across my back and took the trail for Ufizzi.

It wasn't a bad walk, and the day was a fine one, the kind you get rarely in the jungles but which are enough to make up for a whole season of rotten weather. It was a green-golden day, and the underbrush smelled clean from the recent rain. It was washed down, fumigated, and hadn't started to rot again as yet. I couldn't help wondering if I was being a tiresome old fool to worry about Swain—it was that kind of a day.

Old Mary was home, seated in the middle of a hut which was isolated from the rest of the hot, dirty little village. I nodded to her through the open door, and greeted her respectfully. She invited me to come, and cackled happily. There was a girl in the hut also, a tall, slimly built maiden of perhaps sixteen or seventeen, with delicate, wistful features, and the great, liquid eyes of a gentle animal. She was very attractive, and I was very surprised to see her in this place. I was even more surprised when Old Mary proudly told me that the girl was her daughter.

"I didn't know you had a daughter," I said.

Old Mary cackled. "I hide her from white men," she said. "Someday I sell her for good price to chief."

She was a wise old woman. The wrong sort of white man would use this beautiful young girl for his own purposes, and then cast her aside, sullied and spoiled forever in the eyes of her own kind.

OLD MARY was watching me intently as she talked, never moving her eyes from mine. I've been around enough to know that when a

person does that it's usually to prevent you from looking somewhere else—at something he or she doesn't wish you to see. So I glanced around the narrow, thatched hut, and I saw it, saw the thing Old Mary was ashamed of and didn't wish me to see. It was on a rickety chair in the corner, a twelve-inch voodoo doll. It was an amazing likeness of our geologist, Claude Diggers, even to the bits of broken glass imbedded in the face to simulate his spectacles. There was a thorn driven into the doll's stomach.

I looked at her sternly. "Why are you doing this?" I said.

She cackled wildly, but I saw the fear in her eyes. "A joke, a joke," she said.

"You did it for the white man, Swain," I said.

She shook her head vehemently, but I knew I was right. There was a guilty, little-girl quality of impishness in Old Mary's eyes that told me I had found her out. She behaved like a child caught in a small, unimportant lie.

"Yes, you did it for Swain," I said.

Old Mary put her head in her hands and began to weep. I was not impressed. Tears or laughter could mean little or nothing to these people. They cannot always be judged by the standards we apply to ourselves. They are simpler than we think them, and far more devious and wise than any but the keenest white man gives them credit for. I was not interested in her now. The young girl had shifted slightly, and something in her face had caught my attention. She was staring at me, lips parted, and her great gentle eyes glowing with an emotion I could not fail to understand.

"Swain," she murmured. "His name?"

"Yes, that is his name," I said. My

voice was as heavy as my heart. I knew, although Old Mary didn't, what had been going on out here. As surely as if I had witnessed it, I could imagine Swain's reaction when he had seen this pure and lovely young native girl. And I had only to look into her eyes to know what her feelings were. I felt like smashing something. This accounted for Swain's good cheer during the past week, his smiling, twinkling good cheer. This accounted for his calmer, more relaxed manner with Shelly. Ah, yes! Shelly could wait for the while. Swain had found something else to use for his sport.

I motioned the girl to accompany me outside. When we stood together in the sunlight, I looked into her deep, honest eyes, and said, "He is bad. Do you understand?"

She understood my words, but she shook her head and a frown touched her forehead. "No, he good."

"God help you, my child," I muttered, and strode away from her, back toward our camp.

I WAS WAITING for Swain in his house when he returned that evening from his work in the fields. He was hot and tired-looking, but seemed in a good humor. Placing his rifle against the wall, he poured himself a stiff whisky and soda.

"Join me?" he said.

"No."

He turned and looked at me.

"What's the matter with you?"

"I was in Ufizzi today," I said.

He colored slightly, and then smiled. "That's enough to put anyone in a bad humor. Stinking hole, isn't it?"

"I saw the voodoo doll Old Mary made for you," I said.

Swain sat down, crossed his legs and took a long swallow from his

drink. He was doing his best to act unconcerned, but the color in his face was deepening. "That was a silly joke," he said, in an off-hand voice. "Old Mary wanted to make me a love potion for the silver-haired white woman. That's her phrase for Mrs. Diggers, by the way. I pointed out that Mrs. Diggers had a husband, whereupon Old Mary obligingly offered to get rid of him for me." He laughed as if we were sharing a droll joke, the kind old Britishers like to tell about the natives when they are safely retired to their London clubs.

"It isn't funny, Swain," I said.

"Oh, come off it," he said, laughing. "You don't believe in this nonsense, do you?"

"I believe there is a lot in this world I don't understand," I told him. "Because I don't understand something doesn't mean I disbelieve it. But you've tampered with something the natives here believe in, remember that."

He was becoming annoyed. "Well, let's understand each other," he said. "I don't trim my sails to the winds blown up by superstitious natives. They're a pack of wild children, that's all. The best of them isn't worth being taken seriously."

I stood and walked to the door. "I also saw Old Mary's daughter today," I said. "I don't interfere with the personal life of my men, Swain, but—"

"'But' " he said, with a sneer. "You don't interfere, but you're ready to give me a lecture. Don't worry about her, for God's sake. I'll give her a knife and bolt of cloth when I clear out of here. I'll leave her with pleasant memories."

"Don't leave her with anything else," I said, and walked out on him.

That night we dined at the Diggers, it being their turn to serve as

hosts. There was some kind of a native fish for the first course, a dark-fleshed fish served with a heavy cream sauce. Shortly after it had been taken away Diggers complained of pains in his stomach. He took a few sips of wine, and then got to his feet slowly, pressing both hands deeply into his abdomen. His face was very pale, and there was a slick of perspiration on his upper lip.

"I—I think I must lie down," he said.

We helped him into the living room, where he stretched out on the couch. His wife put a blanket over him, and went to fetch a pillow for his head. I glanced at Swain. He was very white, and the muscles along his jawline were tightening convulsively. I knew what he was thinking. I was thinking the same thing.

We were both thinking of the black thorn Old Mary had driven through the voodoo doll's stomach.

Diggers condition worsened rapidly. I dispatched a native boy to Wallabar, which was twenty miles away, and where there was a telegraph station. I sent a note with him with instructions that it be wired to our coast office. They would fly a doctor in by the next morning...

However, it was a wasted effort.

CLAUDE DIGGERS died shortly before midnight, after an hour of convulsive vomiting and intense pain. He said nothing to any of us, just lay there racked and twisted by the convulsions of his body, his weak, watery eyes fixed sightlessly on the ceiling. Shelly burst into tears when I put the blanket over her husband's face, and Swain made himself a drink, a large one, and gulped it down nervously. He caught my arm as I was preparing to leave.

"It was just a coincidence, a weird,

ghastly coincidence," he said. His eyes were very wide and bright. "You know that, don't you? That's all there is to it. I'm right, damn it, tell me I'm right."

I looked at him evenly. "I don't know, Swain," I said, and stepped through the door.

The doctor arrived at nine the following morning. He examined Diggers body, and told us that he had died as the result of a ruptured appendix. It was a natural death beyond a doubt. An operation would have saved him, but that was just one of those things. The doctor issued a certificate of death, expressed his sympathies to Shelly, and returned to the Coast.

That was apparently the end of the matter. Diggers had no family in England, and Shelly decided that he should be buried near the outpost.

"He always loved the jungle," she said, touching an eye delicately with the corner of a handkerchief.

Also, I thought cynically, a burial here is vastly cheaper than sending the body to England for interment.

Diggers was buried the next afternoon. The same day Swain came to me and told me he was quitting.

"You're breaking a contract," I said. I was angry with him, and disgusted, but ridding the camp of him was worth the trouble of finding a new man.

"I'm sorry to leave you in a spot," he said, smiling. "But the place has too many painful memories for Shelly and me."

"You're leaving together?"

"Why, yes. We have lots in common, I've discovered."

"I believe you have," I said.

He flushed slightly at my tone. I turned back to my desk, and after a few seconds I heard him leave. Now the work would come to a standstill, I knew. I must have another geologist

to replace Diggers, and a crew-manager to take Swain's place. The coast office would probably take weeks to dig up two men for the jobs. However, with any luck I'd probably get men with less complicated personal problems than the ones which had disrupted the camp. I decided to stipulate that I wanted no wives here for the duration of the work.

That night, about twelve, I heard a cautious scratching at the front of my house. I had been lying under my netting unable to sleep, and the sound brought me instantly to my feet. I put on slippers and a robe and walked through the dark room to the front door.

For an instant after opening the door I saw nothing. Then as my eyes focused I saw her crouching on the steps, a darker shadow than the blackness. She raised her head and I saw the white shine of her eyes. It was raining and her hair hung straight and wet to her shoulders.

"Come in," I said. I knew somehow that what I had feared had come to pass. This was Old Mary's daughter.

SHE CREPT past me moving as silently, as furtively as an animal in the jungle. I went into the living room, drew the shades and turned on the lights. She stood in the doorway leaning against the jamb, one bare foot resting on the instep of the other. I pointed to a chair but she shook her head slowly. There was no expression in her face, but the absence of it was like the blankness you may see in the eyes of a trapped animal.

I spoke to her, haltingly, in the little of her language I knew. "You are in trouble?" I said.

She nodded slowly, and pressed her damp cheek against the jamb.

"The white man, Swain?" I asked her.

She nodded again.

"You are sure?"

Again she nodded.

I sat down feeling tired and useless and bitter. He had done this too, I was thinking. And no hand would be raised against him. After all, what was a young native girl? She could return to the derision and misery of her village, and bear her child in loneliness and shame. The white man would pack his grips and fly to the coast. That was the way of it, the cruel, unfair way of it, when an unprincipled rotter took his sport with one of these people.

"You've seen him, talked to him?" I asked her.

She nodded, and now I saw something in her face, something that shook me slightly; it was hate, a savage, animal hate.

"He laughed," she said.

"You must forget it," I said. "We are not all like him." What empty, forlorn words. How could they help?

"I know," she said, rather unexpectedly. "You are different. That is why I came."

"How can I help you? I will do what I can."

"You must not hate me."

I stared at her, surprised. "Why should I hate you?"

"Promise me you will not."

"Promise? Of course, I'll promise."

She bent her head gracefully to me, and then turned as silently as a moving shadow and disappeared. I got to my feet calling her name, but when I reached the porch the front door had swung shut and she was gone, absorbed, swallowed up instantly in the great vast blackness.

The next two days passed somehow. I was too angry to talk with Swain and so I avoided him and Shelly. They were disporting them-

selves shamelessly. With Diggers not in the ground a week they were wandering arm-in-arm through the camp, and providing the natives with a fine example of vulgarity and tastelessness.

On the afternoon of the third day they left the camp after lunch and disappeared into the jungle. It began to rain almost immediately, a heavy, hammering downpour. At three-thirty I received word from one of my men that Old Mary had died the night before in Ufizzi. She had lain down to sleep, and had never waked. I knew why she had died, of course. The dream of her life, the future of her child, had been shattered. The daughter was no good to Old Mary now. Who would buy her? Old Mary had learned what had happened. Maybe it wasn't only the financial loss. Possibly she had loved her child. At any rate she had lain down, probably with a stomach full of poison, and had never waked.

FOR SOME reason I wanted to tell Swain about this, and tell him in the presence of Shelly. They had been too protected, too absolved from the misery their actions had precipitated. They would go off gaily to the coast to luxuriate in a grand hotel, while behind them lay a dead man, a dead woman, and a distraught young girl. Well, I thought, by the living God they shan't have it so easy. They will know that Old Mary is dead, and why she died. Let them live with that between them in the future. It wouldn't bother them, probably. It would be a little private joke, no doubt. But it was all I could do.

I set out after them, wearing a slicker against the heavy rain. The trail was muddy, and a miasma was steaming up from the sour, soggy ground, the rotting underbrush. I crossed the narrow bridge over the

stream with greater than usual care. The drumming rain brought the crocodiles off the banks and into the water. They drifted sluggishly in the muddy water, their lidded eyes seeming vaguely disappointed that the commotion on the surface was not caused by anything edible.

I walked for another five minutes until the trail widened into a great clearing. It was there that I spotted Swain and Shelly. They were hurrying along the side of the clearing about a hundred yards off, staying close to the tall, gnarled trees for shelter. Shelly wore boots and shorts, and a waist-length yellow jacket that matched her hair. They were on their way back to camp, half-running, half-walking over the soggy ground.

I heard Shelly laugh, and the sound infuriated me. This was adventure to her, gay and cheerful. Then I heard something else, a rending, cracking noise that cannonaded through the jungle like the report of a big rifle. I've heard this sound before, and I knew it was the sudden, straining cracking of a great tree. Sometimes, when a tree is very old, it is bent unnaturally by the weight of other trees, or by the settling of the ground. The tree is too old to grow into the new pattern, and its fibres stubbornly resist the new pressure. Then one day, during a rain or a particularly hot spell, the constraint gives way and the old tree, suddenly liberated, snaps triumphantly back to its old position. All of this flashed through my mind the instant I heard the report. In the same instant I saw a tree under which Shelly was walking twist and hurl its branches to the sky.

What I saw next stopped my heart for a second, and then I was racing toward them, sliding and stumbling in the sticky ooze, and digging fran-

tically into my pocket for my knife.

I had seen a thin, sinewy trailer snapped out like a whip by the jerking motion of the tree. It had struck Shelly with the bite of a lash, pinioning her arms to her sides, and coiling in a tight, slimy noose about her throat. She screamed once, a shrill, terrible scream, and then the mighty tree had straightened its twisted old trunk and jerked her high into the air. She went up like a doll on the end of a string, and she screamed no more. Only her desperately churning legs gave evidence that she was a human being, and not some toy in the hands of a playing child.

Swain was leaping up and down in a futile attempt to catch her ankles, and shouting something in a wild incredulous voice. When I got to his side I saw that there was nothing at all to do, that even if I could manage to balance him on my shoulders he would still be unable to reach her feet.

"Do something!" Swain screamed, clawing at my arms. "She'll die, she'll strangle."

ALTHOUGH I knew it was useless I braced myself and told him to climb onto my back. It was impossible; his boots were caked with slimy mud, and he pitched off and landed on his face on the ground. This seemed to drive him mad. He stared about wildly, and then broke into a dead run toward the camp, scrambling and sliding in the mud like some giant drunken crab.

I looked up at Shelly's body swinging slightly twenty feet above my head, and saw that her feet were still. She hung limp, motionless, and I knew that she was dead.

I started back after Swain, traveling as fast as possible, and I reached the spot where the trail widened out

at the stream just in time to see him stagger and slip on the narrow bridge, crash through the handrailing and disappear toward the water. I heard him scream once, terribly, and then there was nothing but the drumming rain, the great still jungle, and the wind high in the trees. When I reached the bridge, weak and shaken, I stared down at the slowly moving water, and at the log-like shapes of the crocodiles. They did not seem sluggish now. They moved about in circles, cruising excitedly and hopefully....

The end of it came the next day when I made my last trip to Ufizzi. I walked through the village to Old Mary's hut and found her daughter sitting motionless on the dirt floor. She was dry-eyed, but I knew she had wept.

"You do not hate me?" she said.

I shook my head slowly, and looked around the room. I knew what I would see, but seeing it was a

THE END

shock. I felt my breath leave my body with a gasp, and I knew that the girl was watching me in fear.

There was a voodoo doll on a small table, a tiny one, unmistakably feminine, with hair made of light straw that gleamed like silver in the dim room. She was hanging by her neck from a crude scaffolding.

"Where is the other one?" I said.

"I could not do it," she answered. "He was bad, but I felt love for him."

"What did you do with his doll?"

She put her hands to her face. Her words, muffled and soft, sent a chill down my back. "I threw it away," she said. "I threw it in the river. I did not know—" she stopped and shook her head slowly.

That it would be eaten, I thought, finishing her sentence.

I looked at her a moment, not knowing or understanding her, or this jungle she came from, and then I said good-by softly and started back to my camp.

HOPE FOR THE HOPELESS

• • • •

A NEW PROBLEM for humanity is almost invariably followed by a scientific discovery to counteract it. Now, a material extracted from the spleens or other blood-forming parts of animals may be the means of saving the atom bomb victim from the effects of lethal radiation.

Studies made at the Goldblatt Memorial Hospital of the University of Chicago show that the blood-forming properties of the spleen also produces new blood. Dr. Leon Jacobson, working on this project, ground up spleens and injected them into mice which had been radiated with more than a lethal dose, and blood began being produced again.

The blood-producing substance in the spleen must be refined out before it can be used on humans, since other parts of the spleen can be dangerous to the radiation patient.

—Sam Dewey

WHO NEEDS MUSCLES?

YOU DON'T have to be the proverbial strong man to be able to exert a vast quantity of physical pressure. All you need is a needle, and with your little finger it's possible to distribute 15,000 pounds of pressure per square inch.

Since pressure is force distributed over a surface, a man can exert with his finger about three-quarters of a pound of force. And since a force of one pound distributed over one square inch exerts only a one-pound-per-square-inch pressure, distributed over 1/10 square inch the one-pound pressure will produce a pressure of 10 pounds per square inch.

By pressing a needle onto a piece of fabric, the force is distributed onto a surface of perhaps .00005 square inches. Which means that by pressing a needle into a piece of fabric, you can get a resulting pressure of 15,000 pounds per square inch.

—Merritt Linn



THE BLESSED ASSASSINS

By Ivar Jorgensen

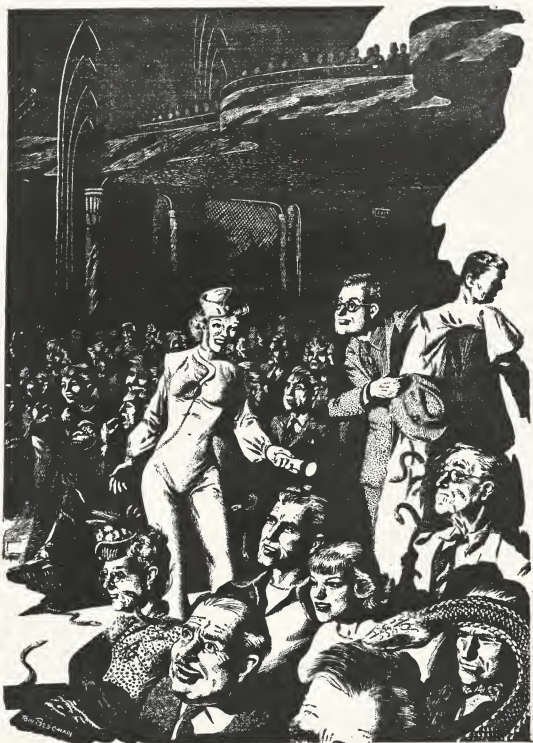
It began as a series of innocent pranks. It moved swiftly toward a point where the very foundations of the nation began to crumble

I WOKE up and saw the legs. It was nice to know they were mine. Or at least that I had a deed to them. They belonged to Ginny and Ginny is my wife.

As she slipped on a dressing gown she glanced over and saw that my eyes were open. She didn't smile. "Nice of you to come home last night," She put in a touch of acid.

I yawned. "You're lucky to have a husband. I came close to not making it. When's coffee?"

"Ten minutes, m'lud." She sniffed, and strode out of the bedroom trying to look regal. But you can't look regal in a dressing gown that comes only to the middle of your thighs. You can only look cute. I grinned and closed my eyes, allotting myself five more



Horror crawled unseen through the theater

wonderful minutes of this luxury.

The smell of coffee brought me out of it. I got up and went downstairs like a liege-lord enjoying his liege. And thankful that Ginny has something more than nice legs. She makes a terrific cup of coffee.

The paper was there too—placed dutifully beside my napkin. I passed up the napkin and opened the paper. Ginny let me read for possibly thirty seconds—then broke it up. "What did you mean?" she asked.

"What did I mean by what?"

"By saying you came close to not making it."

"A quick foot on the brake saved me—an alert hand on the wheel. Don't buy any more of this jelly."

"How did it happen?"

"I was driving home—passing a character on the highway. He blew a tire. His heap swerved and dived at me like a watchdog in its own backyard."

"What happened to the character?"

"Sprained ankle and a split lip."

Ginny sighed. "People should be more careful about their tires."

"It wasn't a bad tire. Some goon had sliced it straight across with a sharp knife—clear through to the inner cord. There's an item here in the paper about it. That's because the guy happens to work for said paper."

"Does it mention your name?"

"Why should it? I didn't slice his tire. How about some more coffee?"

"You've had two cups."

"I know, but I like to see you get up and walk into the kitchen. You wobble real provocative."

Ginny went for more coffee, but she refused to wobble.

THAT WAS how it started—so far as I was concerned at least—but it wasn't the actual beginning.

The actual beginning isn't on record. And even though I'm a plain-clothes cop with a fairly good record and a clean nose, I could hardly be expected to blow my top over that single incident. A sliced left front tire that sent a car into a ditch; hardly an example of good citizenship, but not a reason for calling out the militia, either.

I promptly forgot the incident that morning after telling Ginny about it, and concentrated on Maranoff's latest tirade against the United States. It was very bitter, as usual, but there was more to it than that; an apparent change in Russian policy. This dark horse who had stepped into Uncle Joe Stalin's boots after the latter's death was doing his own talking. Uncle Joe had always stayed pretty quiet and let his underlings do the shouting. The world was wondering about these blasts from the very highest Russian echelon—and worrying, too, because now there was nobody up above to put on the damper. It looked like a major change in Russian policy. The Russians had been blasting away for years, though, so maybe it wasn't too important.

The really important thing to me—at the moment—was the time. Nine-O-five, and I was due in the station at ten. I finished my coffee, kissed Ginny on her little red mouth, and headed for the garage. As I got into the car I wondered if anyone had sliced my tires, but I didn't bother checking. Instead, I drove to work, sneaking over the speed limit once or twice on the theory that, even though I was a cop, I was still a citizen and retained the citizen's right to break the law once in a while.

Ryan was on the desk. He rumbled, "Hullo, Barnes."

I acknowledged the bass-viol greet-

ing. "Is the city peaceful this fine morning?"

"The Irish are under control at least. There's a guy waiting to see you. Name of Best."

"Fine, show him into my office."

"He's already there. He's got a bandage on his wrist. You don't remember breaking anybody's arm, do you?"

"Not me. I haven't got the strength."

THE ROOM where Best was waiting belonged to me along with four other plain-clothes men, but none of them were around so we had it to ourselves. I hadn't placed the name, but when I saw Best I of course knew him. He still looked a little shaken from his experience.

I offered him a cigarette. "Feeling a little better this morning?"

He refused the smoke. "Oh, I'm quite all right now."

I sat down and put my elbow over the place where some responsible guardian of the law had carved his initials into the desk. "I imagine you wish to file a complaint."

Best shook his head. "No—that would be pretty much a waste of time, wouldn't it?"

I agreed with him, but not for publication. "It's the thing to do in such cases. We could possibly turn up your man. But complaints of that nature are filed—"

"Let's forget that angle. I asked for you because—well, I knew your name from last night and—"

"You've got something on your mind?"

"Yes. It may be just my imagination but—" He leaned forward, frowning. "Lieutenant, is there a wave of vandalism sweeping the city?"

"No more so than usual as far as I

can see; why do you ask?"

"I'm beginning to get that impression."

"We could check with the traffic detail."

"No—I didn't mean just relative to automobiles. You see, a friend of mine told me there would be a marked increase in hooliganism. Maybe my tire being cut only a week after he told me was just pure coincidence, but—"

"Would you mind telling me your friend's name?"

"Not at all. Albert Eckman. He's a speculator by profession; the type known around the Board of Trade as a 'chart player'. He keeps graphs on commodities and stocks. He's made and lost a great deal of money in his time. At the moment, he's comparatively wealthy."

I could dredge up only one bit of advice for Mr. Best. "I wouldn't let it worry me if I were you. I'm sure having your tire cut at this particular time *was* a coincidence. Things of such a nature—"

And at that precise moment, another coincidence reared up and smacked us in the face—or rather, in the ears.

The soul-ripping sound of crashing metal—a sound easily identified. A collision out in the street.

I forgot Mr. Best and headed for the front door. Ryan was holding it open.

The crackup looked bad at first glance. Apparently a new Packard had made a sharp left turn in front of the station and crashed into the rear end of a middle-aged Chevrolet standing on the right side of the street minding its own business.

The Chevy had been nudged up on the sidewalk, and the Packard's nose was buried somewhere in front of the

little car's gas tank. The driver of the Chevy, a young woman, had staggered from behind the wheel and was just in the act of collapsing on the sidewalk.

Ryan's heavy footsteps were coming up behind me, so I left her to him and ran to the Packard.

AN ELDERLY man lay forward over the wheel with his face in his hat. Blood was seeping around the crushed brim. I raised his head about an inch—far enough to see the wound and no farther. It was in the form of a gash across his forehead and didn't look too serious. X rays would tell positively.

The medicos had been right on our heels, which wasn't phenomenal because there was an ambulance unit in the garage behind the station. From their point of view, this was fine—an accident happening practically in the middle of their poker table.

I looked over my shoulder into a pair of black horn-rims and a bored expression and got out of the way. Cars were piling up, so I went out and began unpiling them. Very shortly, a pair of traffic lads showed up from both directions and I was out of a job.

This left nothing to do but look over the damage. I walked toward the Packard, noting that Ryan had shooed the public back from the wrecks—all but one man who refused to be shooed. My Mr. Best. He motioned me in close. I squatted down beside him. He pointed to a place where the fender metal had been turned back like the top of a sardine can. "Right through there," he said. "You can see it clearly."

I could see it all right. A bright groove, made by a file across the left tie-rod. The infinitesimal bit of undisturbed metal had parted, leaving the

ends filed off at the same angle. It wasn't necessary to bring the snapped rod together in order to reconstruct the groove.

"It's the same on the other side," Best said.

I scowled at him. "How did you find it so quick?"

He glanced up at me—a trifle guiltily, I thought. "Why—why I was looking for it, I guess. If you wanted to sabotage a car, that would be the logical—"

The irritation I felt was no doubt unreasonable, but I felt it just the same. "We've got specialists to check that sort of thing."

"No doubt, but I didn't touch anything."

"You'll have to get back out of the way. The tow-truck will be here in a minute."

"I understand, but about meeting Albert Eckman—"

"Why would I want to meet him?"

"I just thought—" Best dug into his coat and pushed out a card. I took it automatically, slipping it in with other cards I carried in my breast pocket.

"I've got to get to work now," Best said. "I'm late. But I'm sure Mr. Eckman would be glad to talk to you any time."

Best left without saying goodbye. Not that he hurt my feelings. I forgot about him thirty seconds after he was out of sight.

REGARDLESS OF the excitement, I had my day's work to do. This consisted of trying to find a man named Fletcher who had escaped from a California pokey and who would probably, the Cal cops thought, head for the lap of an old sweetheart who lived at an address in Western Heights—this busy little Chicago suburb that paid my salary.

She lived on Convent Street—a nice irony, I thought. I drove north on Wescott Boulevard and into the shoddiest part of town. As I pulled into Keeler Avenue, I saw something that made me kick the brake hard. Nothing much—just a kid with an axe chopping down a telephone pole.

I got out of the car and walked over. The kid, around ten maybe, was all alone in the world—deep in the solitude of the north woods. Two men were standing nearby. The younger one, evidently thinking me another phone-company hater, grinned and wagged a thumb toward the kid. A mute's way of saying—pretty cute, huh? I grabbed the axe at the top of a swing.

The kid was a tough little monkey. He scowled and seemed about ready to take me on. Then he thought better of it and backed away, his face sullen. I was nothing but an old kill-joy.

The men thought so too. The younger one lost his grin and took a step in my direction. "What you hornin' in for?" he wanted to know.

Somehow I didn't feel like throwing my official weight. "Those poles weren't put there for fire wood. Your kid?"

"Naw!"

"Your axe?"

"Naw—his." He fingered the other man but kept his eye on me. "You looking for trouble?"

"Sure." I hefted the axe and stared vaguely at his wish bone. He looked at the axe too. He growled. I knew from experience it was a retreating growl and gave my attention to the phone pole. The kid had just gotten started, so it only had a couple of small chunks out of it. I shot-putted the axe toward its owner. "Let this happen again and you'll pay a stiff fine."

He just managed to catch the handle in time to save a split leg. As it was, the head smacked his shin bone and brought a howl. I got into my car and drove away with both of them glowering at me.

THE THUG'S girlfriend's name was Natacha Smith, an ideal mixture of the exotic and the commonplace. And the Cal cop's use of the word *old* certainly didn't refer to age. She met me at the door of a second-floor kitchenette wearing a dressing gown and a head of nicely blonded hair. You got the impression she would shuck off the gown if the occasion demanded. She was around twenty-one, I judged, and she insisted she hadn't seen Bill Fletcher since before the Cal rap.

"You wanta come in and look around?"

The smile made it a real invitation to find out. I went in and checked. It took about forty seconds to find out she was the only one there, unless the guy was flattened under the wallpaper. I started toward the door. She went around me and got there first. She turned, smiling. Somehow, the string on her dressing gown had gotten untied. The gown hung open.

"Where did you get the bruises?" I asked.

That turned her sullen. She jerked the gown tight and began retying it. "Some clever bastard busted the hall light and then tied a string across the top step. I like ta killed myself."

"You were lucky. Know who did it?"

"I think so."

"Why don't you put in a complaint?"

"I can fight my own battles."

"That's the wrong attitude. Let us know if Fletcher turns up."

"I'll do that."

I knew she was lying and she knew I knew it. With this mutual knowledge, we parted company. I went down and got into my car and drove back as I'd come. The two men were still lounging by the telephone post, but the kid and the axe had disappeared. I hoped they weren't back together again....

I did a little paper work at the office and chewed the fat a while. A final check showed nothing on the spindles, so it looked like an early trip home for a change. Right along with the nine-to-fivers.

On the way out I checked with Ryan and found out the two victims of the crackup had come out very lucky. The girl had been hospitalized for shock and would go home the following morning. The X rays gave the man a clean bill of health and he was even then in the bosom of his family. Where I would be myself very soon.

I hit heavy traffic on the highway and pulled into the garage just at five-thirty. The kitchen light was on, but being childish in certain things, I sneaked around front to come in through the living room and surprise Ginny.

I got the feeling right after opening the front door—that quiet tight feeling you get from first contact with trouble's aura. I went through the aura. I went through the quiet house, into the kitchen.

Ginny was lying on the floor in a V, with both arms wrapped tight around her stomach. She heard my steps; her eyes rolled. She saw me. She whispered something; something that sounded like *help me*. I couldn't tell.

DOC WINSTEAD came down from upstairs. I'd stayed with her until he got there and then I left them alone in the bedroom. Doc said,

"She's going to be all right. That mustard and egg-white emetic you gave her probably saved her life." It was what he'd told me to do over the phone.

"What do you think it was?"

He shrugged. "I wouldn't care to guess when we can find out for sure. Did you get me the sample?"

"I put some in a medicine bottle. But you don't have to bother. I'll shoot it to the police lab."

"Of course, but you'd better give me a sample too. Matter of practice, you know."

"Sure, Doc."

I went into the kitchen thinking what a good, honest, old egg Doc Winstead was. He'd been our family physician for years, but he had ethics. Where poison was concerned, the doc got a sample. Yet it never occurred to him to get it himself. If I'd tried to murder Ginny I could have given him a sample as phony as dishwater.

But it so happened I hadn't tried to murder my wife, so after Ginny's sister Marg got there to sit with her, I went to work in the kitchen.

Suspicion fell immediately on a half-eaten dish of cottage cheese. It was sitting in the drain board of the sink with the spoon still in it. I checked it closely and could see the green specks distributed unevenly. The specks weren't chopped chives either.

I got the carton with the rest of the cheese in it out of the ice box and checked it. Same green spots. I got a paper sack, put in the dish, the carton, and the sample I'd scraped up of Ginny's stomach contents. I put the sack into the refrigerator and then dug into the top drawer of the cabinet where Ginny kept her food bills. I called Jack's Market on a chance it was still open. It wasn't, so I got Jack Spinelli's home phone out of the book and called him. When a man

answered and said he was Spinelli I told him, "My wife ate some of your cottage cheese and it almost killed her. It was poisoned. What have you got to say for yourself?"

He had a lot to say, beginning with *Madre Mia* and ending up by telling me it couldn't have been his cheese and who was I?

"I'm Mrs. Barne's husband."

"The policeman. *Madre Mia*! Mrs. Barnes. Yes—she buy the cheese today. But it is good cheese. I never poison nobody. You think I want lose my business?"

"I'm not necessarily blaming you. The point is this—can you remember who else bought cheese from that same lot? It's important. Maybe we can save some lives."

He could remember three off-hand, including Ginny. But there had been two dozen pints of the stuff and he'd sold out completely. He said he'd have a record of the charge accounts but not of the casual, cash shoppers,

"Get the hell down to your store and check on it. Call the ones you have a record on and warn them. I'll send a policeman down to help you. He'll meet you at your store."

I called Radio direct and gave them the dope. As I hung up, I heard them detailing a prowler car in the neighborhood. I went upstairs to see how Ginny was. She was sleeping—out of danger. It had been close, but she was going to be all right. I took my paper bag and got the car out and headed for the station.

AT SEVEN o'clock the next morning two reports came in almost simultaneously. First, from the two uniform cops who'd spent the night phoning and running around town with the frantic Mr. Spinelli.

Ryan checked them in and said, "You look tired, boys. What's the

trouble? Been out late?"

"Can it," Erickson growled. "You should beat the town all night giving people receipts for cottage cheese. I'll never be able to look the stuff in the face again."

They'd located fourteen of the cartons. In nine cases, the buyers had eaten them with no ill effects whatever. The other five pints hadn't been opened. The cops brought all fourteen cartons in with names and addresses written on each one.

I'd been out back with the ambulance detail. I asked Ryan, "Any poison reports from the hospitals?"

"Nary a one."

I was thankful for that, of course, but it put a new light on the thing. It looked as though somebody was gunning for Ginny and me. Or that's the way I thought it looked. I was too tired to analyze it.

The phone rang and Ryan gave it to me. It was Carney at the lab. "You want the fancy words?"

"I just want to know what it was."

"Rat poison to you."

"Okay. We're sending down some more cartons. Let me know how they check. I'm going home to bed."

I didn't have any definite ideas on the thing then, but some instinct must have been working in my mind because I went out to my car and checked my tires. I got clear around the car before I caught myself. "Why, you goddam old woman," I muttered and got in behind the wheel. I hit sixty on the way home, daring some traffic bum to pick me up. None of them did.

Marge said Ginny had been awake for several hours and had gone to sleep again. I told Marge to go home, but instead she crawled in with Ginny and I bunked in the spare bedroom. I could have slept on top of a cement mixer.

Just as I dozed off, I thought I heard a scream somewhere—a long way off. I was practically asleep, though, and charged the yell to my imagination.

It wasn't my imagination. I found that out six hours later when I woke up and went downstairs to find Ginny lying on the lounge with Marge cleaning up some tea things in the kitchen.

"How you feeling?"

"All right. I'll be as good as new in a couple of days."

I bent over and kissed her. "It was a close call."

The fright was still in her eyes. "If you hadn't come home early..."

"Let's not talk about it. I came home early."

Marge came in from the kitchen. "As long as you're up I'm going over to the Wilsons and see if I can help."

"What happened there?"

Marge was putting on her coat. "Oh—that's right. You wouldn't know. After you went to bed Mrs. Wilson carried some garbage out. One of the back steps was gone. She fell through the hole and broke her leg."

A LITTLE chill went up my back. I looked closely at Marge and then turned my eyes on Ginny. Neither of them seemed upset about it. Sorry, of course, as anyone would be about a neighbor's hard luck, but not scared. Maybe I was being a damned fool, but the words of one Mr. Best came unbidden into my mind:

"A friend of mine told me there would be a marked increase in hooliganism. Maybe my tire being cut only a week after he told me was only coincidence, but..."

My mind ran ahead along that same line. Maybe Ginny getting poisoned, a kid chopping down a telephone pole, a Convent Street harlot tripping over a cord in the dark, and Mrs. Wilson

breaking her leg, were all coincidences but—

I got up and took a fast turn around the room. Hell! My nerves were just shot. Why should I even bother to rate them as coincidences or anything else? Accidents happened to people every day. I had just happened to be brought into contact with several in a very short time.

But somehow the rebuttal wasn't convincing. Reason snapped right back with: accidents, yes—but not sliced tires—not strings stretched in the dark—not rat poison in cottage cheese—not a step taken away in the dark.

I turned to Ginny. "Are you all right, hon? Can I go out for a while?"

"Certainly. I told you—I'll be as good as new in a couple of days."

I bent to kiss her. She hung onto me. It felt good. I kissed her hard and then went over to the Wilsons to look at that step. It had been pried up at either end with a heavy hammer or a crowbar and set carefully against the wall by the stairs.

Just a little thing. I wouldn't close any banks. But the mute threat of that empty spot where a step should have been, seemed like a black, toothless maw leering at me.

A friend of mine told me—

There was a savageness in the motion of my jerking a handful of cards from the breast pocket of my jacket. I sorted through them. There it was: Albert Eckman, 17 Parkman Drive. Little doubt that our man was in the money. I went over and got the car and drove north.

IT WAS ONE of those antique, rambling, twenty-room places concerning which the owner always says proudly, "They really *built* houses in days." It was quite a jaunt from the street to the stairs, and a respectable

hike from the stairs to the door, but I made it, and with strength enough left to punch the button.

The door opened and a man in robe and slippers peered at me.

"Mr. Eckman?"

"That's right."

He was the last man in the world I'd have picked as a gambler. A small, professorish character with *pinc nez* glasses and sort of a built-in, expectant smile. But amiable enough. I said, "I'm Lieutenant Paul Craig of the police department."

"The police! My, my!" And he peered past me toward the street as though wondering if he'd forgotten and left his car next to a plug.

"I'm not here in any official capacity. I heard of you through a mutual acquaintance. A Mr. Best."

"Oh, yes. I know Best rather well. He writes editorials for the *Eagle*. Won't you come in?"

It was like walking into a cavern. "We'll go to my study," Eckman said, and pattered about four miles rearward through a long hallway.

When I was just beginning to regret not bringing my canteen, he opened a door and stood aside to let me enter. The place looked like a very comfortable office; the office of a man who could spend several thousand on decorating a room if he felt like it. There was a huge desk against one wall and beside it were lined four tickers of various shapes and sizes, three of them under glass bells.

"I have my office out here," Eckman said, "so I very seldom go downtown. A little more expensive this way, but I love this old house. They really built them in those days."

"How long have you owned it?" I asked the question and then realized it was pretty personal on such short acquaintance.

Eckman took no offense, however.

He concentrated for a moment, then said, "I bought it after my last killing in 1951. That's eight years. My, how time flies! Won't you sit down?"

I took a big leather chair, so deep you felt you were sitting on the floor—but comfortable. Eckman parked behind the desk and peered across at me. That desk would have been nice to hold a track meet. Far over at the other end, the tickers were chattering like old women with loose plates and sticking out long paper tongues at each other.

Eckman noted me eyeing them and said, "Those are my implements of trade. A grain ticker, a cotton ticker, one for commodities, and the black one gives stock quotations."

"Best told me you were a speculator."

His smile deepened into a beam. "Yes. Been at it since I was thirteen years old. When I was fifteen, I broke two bucket shops in St. Louis. At twenty, I had a million dollars. At twenty-three I washed dishes for six months to keep from starving to death."

THIS LAST was evidently a fond memory. I let him hug it for a moment before I said, "Best mentioned you as a chart player."

"That's right. I have charts on wheat dating back to the days of ancient Egypt. Are you interested in charts?"

"I'm not sure. It's something else I came to see you about. To be specific—a remark you made to Mr. Best and I quote."

I quoted and then laid it on the line. In five minutes he knew all about my past two days. I stopped talking and he sat there in silence, apparently thinking things over. I used the time for additional sizing-up. And I was impressed with what I saw.

Eckman had an open smile, a childish enthusiasm for what he had and what he'd done. But there was nothing shallow about him. Of that I was certain. He was exactly the kind of a guy you always overlook and patronize, until it turns out he's the head of an international spy ring and it took ten years to catch up with him; or the kind of a guy who made a million dollars without sticking his head out the front door.

He said, "I gather you're a little worried about this sudden increase in vicious mischief?"

"I'm not sure there *is* an increase."

"You may be certain there is. And also that it has hardly started. If I told you some of the things I expect, you wouldn't believe me—you couldn't possibly believe me."

"I'd like to hear anything you have to tell me."

He laid his glasses on the desk. "Do you know anything about progression charts?"

"Nothing at all."

"I'd be happy to give you any knowledge I have, but it would make no sense to you without a little rudimentary instruction on charts and their purposes."

"I don't want to take up too much of your time."

"It's a privilege. I enjoy talking about them. They're my life, really. If you have a few minutes—"

"I have."

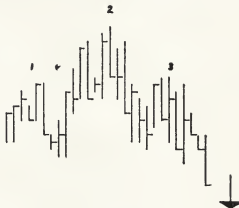
"Bring one of those straight-back chairs—pull it up beside me here."

While I was doing this, he took a large sheet of graph paper from a drawer and spread it on the desk. "This," he said, with a relish, "is standard chart paper. It has sixteen squares to the inch. Now, we'll take grain prices first. The commonest way to chart price is to mark the high and low prices of the day on your

graph and connect them with a straight line. Thus, over a period of time, you could easily have a formation that looks like this:



"That happens to be one of the basic prophetic formations in price charting. It's called a *head and shoulder* bottom. Reverse it thus, and it becomes a *head and shoulder* top."



"Yes, but what does it mean?"

"That the price you're charting will rise from such a bottom, or drop from such a top."

"Then you either buy or sell, as the case may be?"

"Sometimes—sometimes not. Such a formation is characteristic of a slow market. It doesn't throw prices very far in either direction."

I decided I'd come rushing across town to make chit-chat with a crackpot. Still, the furnishings in the place called me a liar.

Eckman leaned back and looked at the ceiling. He said, "A chart, Mr. Craig, is a weird and wonderful thing. It speaks a language of its own. If you understand its language, it tells you the shape of things to come with an accuracy that staggers the imagination. I've spent a lifetime learning the language of the chart. Yet I only know a smattering of it."

It might have been very interesting under other circumstances. I said, "But Mr. Eckman—what has this got to do with my wife being poisoned?"

He threw it at me right from the ankles. "A chart told me over a month ago that your wife would be poisoned."

Before I could hit back, he held up a hand. "That's figurative, of course. It told me about poisonings, tire-slashing, step-breaking, and any number of vicious acts of which neither of us could possibly dream—mischief yet to occur."

Either this guy was for the birds, or he belonged at the head of the country.

"Let's go back to markets for a moment. Mr. Craig, as the standard of prophetic charting. You must understand, to begin with, that a market is a device for deceiving the majority of the people. The majority cannot win in any form of money exchange. Therefore, the market must appear to lie at all times. This is proven by the fact that a market on a bottom appears to be so weak, no man in his right mind would dare buy it. It looks the weakest, always, on the bottom quotation. From there it goes up.

"And to reverse the process, the top quotation of a roaring bull market invariably scares the bravest seller. But the market never goes higher than that last quotation. Let me show you another formation." He drew lines on the graph paper and came up with:



"There are a lot of prophetic formations in charts, but that one is the most dangerous signal a chart can give. It's a *three point drive bottom with a right hand cleaner*. I've seen formations like that throw wheat up four dollars a bushel and impoverish every bear in the country. It's the signal that the sky is the limit. Put it on top and the reverse is true. The famous depression of '29 began from just that formation, Mr. Craig." He paused, musing. "A drive bottom cost me three hundred thousand dollars in '39."

"You sold?"

"Everything anybody would buy. I didn't believe the chart. I walked home."

HE CAME quickly out of the past to get up and take a large, leather-bound book from a shelf behind him. He said, "Charting is also a hobby with me, Mr. Craig. I've charted everything from the rise of social justice in Africa to the career of a race horse from the day of its birth.

It's just a matter of devising a fixed unit of identifiable change which can be recorded visibly on paper." He opened the book to a long, sprawling, beautifully-done chart. "I call this one a graph of predictable politico-human behavior. From the practical standpoint, it translates into slashed tires and poisoned cottage cheese. And, incidentally, the gathering of the needed information costs me a lot of money. Now, make note of how this graph has moved over the last twenty years."

It had wandered aimlessly across the paper in a more or less straight line.

He turned the page and there was more of it. More—and I'd learned enough in those few minutes to send a chill up my spine at what I saw. Suddenly, the graph had grown restless. It had poked its nose up as though sniffing the higher atmosphere, then turned down to explore the basement. Now it began getting really nervous—to thresh around as though tiring of restraint.

"The small units that go to make up this chart," Eckman said, "couldn't possibly be apparent to any man or agency in the country. Certainly not to the police, because the majority of the incidents I use as basics aren't reported to them. I depend on newspaper connections. That's how I happen to know Best."

He paused, quietly. Then he said, "One of the most vicious drive bottoms I've seen in forty years of charting."

He closed the book and I got slowly to my feet. "Do those formations always work?"

"No, of course not. If they did it would be an exact science and would defeat its own purpose. Perfect bottoms have been broken; perfect tops have been violated in the past

and will be in the future."

"Then this may mean nothing at all?"

"It could mean absolutely nothing." He had turned deeply serious. "God grant that this scourge will pass us by."

"If it doesn't—what do you see for the future—in terms a dumb cop can understand?"

"Heaven only knows. Bloodshed—a sudden complete reversal of our customs and living practices. Anarchy—perhaps revolution."

"But, good Lord, man! Why? That damn chart isn't God. It doesn't make things happen. It only records them."

"That's entirely true. As to the causes of what will come to pass—well, I have my own theories. Those theories made me start graphing this subject in the first place."

"What are your theories?"

He debated inwardly. "Let's wait and see what happens. Maybe there's no need to worry. If the country blows up in our faces—come and see me again."

He walked me to the door, and by the time we got there his natural optimism had returned. "Don't start speculating on what I've shown you here today," he said. You could lose your shirt on them."

"Don't worry," I said. "I'm no gambler. If I lose fifteen cents pitching pennies, I'm sick for a week."

IT WAS good to get out into the air again; out into the sane city where all the silly panic I'd piled up could mix with good, healthy, poisonous gas fumes and disappear.

The reaction came as soon as I started my car and heard that gummy piston breaking the rhythm of the motor. Good lord! How screwy could a guy get?

Well, I'd asked for it. I'd poked my

rose in where it didn't belong and had gotten a blossom hung on it. Lieutenant Paul Craig was slipping. I thought of what would happen if I gave the boys down at the station a blow-by-blow description of my interview with Albert Eckman.

Halfway downtown I pulled into a gas station and dialed home. Ginny answered. I asked, "Everything all right?"

"Uh-huh. Everything except I miss you."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself. We've been married three years now."

"I know. I guess I'm just weak."

"So am I. I miss you. I'm coming home."

"But you've got to go to work."

"The hell with that. I'll never work again. I'll throw up my job. I'll buy a ticker and sit in the parlor all day and make a million."

"You fool—what are you talking about?"

"It's simple. All you need is a sheet of graph paper."

"Darling—whatever *are* you saying?"

"Skip it, angel. I'll go to work if you promise to keep your little fanny glued to the lounge all day."

"Paul! This is a public phone!"

"That's all right. Dear operator: My wife has a cute fanny. Love and kisses. The Shadow."

"Don't be so silly."

"Okay—I'll be home early."

"Hurry."

I hung up and went back to the car, feeling warm and good again. Silly chatter. Sure. But sane and normal beside some other talk I'd had that morning.

I drove to the station.

THE PLACE was full of kids—a round dozen of them were clut-

tering up the room and irking Ryan no end. I asked, "What is it—boy's week?"

The three uniformed cops herding the kids were scowling. They said nothing. Ryan was scowling too. He said, "These blessed little assassins went hog wild. They ganged up during the noon hour and started heaving rocks at the Grant Public School. Broke every window in the south wall. The flying glass cut up two teachers."

"There were more," one of the cops growled. "This was all we could collect."

It didn't faze me. Way back—as a kid—I'd done the same thing once. A great big shining window to the principal's office had been asking for five years to be broken. One day I accommodated the damn thing. I wasn't caught, though, and I heard that pleasant tinkle for weeks afterward in my dreams.

The kids didn't look bad. They looked more bewildered than anything else. Their collective expression could be summed up in two words: Who—me?

"All the parents have been notified. We're holding them until they come after them. There's a big bill to be footed."

I visualized all the lickings there would be a little later. You didn't need a graph to predict the immediate future of this bunch. I grinned at a big-eyed little tow-head and went over to check the spindle.

Fletcher had been located in Oregon, with a former sweetheart. My trip had been for nothing. Evidently the guy kept spares. And I'd been willing to bet the blonde on Convent Street would refuse to believe it if I went out and told her.

A Mrs. Whipple had died at ten o'clock that morning. Diagnosis—strychnine sulphate hidden in an in-

nocent-appearing dish of cottage cheese.

That made two cartons poisoned. I was a little sick at realizing how easily that report could have read: Mrs. Craig. You can be awfully selfish under such circumstances. I was so busy being thankful I completely forgot about a man who hadn't been so lucky. A Mr. Whipple.

There was nothing on the spindle that couldn't wait until the next day, so I started for home and Ginny. I suddenly wanted to see her—wanted to look again at my living, breathing, wife.

ON THE way out I checked at the desk and found that Joe Hillman had been assigned to the Spinelli case. He already had two persons in custody. A clerk and a delivery boy who worked for Spinelli. They were grilling them separately and expected a break any time.

The parents were beginning to dribble in now and the place was livening up. I slipped out and got into the car and drove home.

Marge was still there. She'd spent three hours at the Wilson home and told us what a hardship the accident was for them. Three children—the oldest eight years—and a husband who was holding down two jobs in order to keep even. For those reasons Mrs. Wilson had refused to go to the hospital. She'd had her bed set up in the middle of the living room and was directing activities from there.

Marge got supper; or rather a light snack, because none of us was very hungry. We had canned tomato soup; canned beans, and strawberries that came frozen in a metal container.

Then Marge went home and Ginny and I played canasta. It was pleasant sitting there in the front room across the card table from Ginny. She beat me two games and we were in the

middle of the third when the phone rang. I glanced at my wrist watch as I got up and was surprised to see that three hours had gone by.

It was Martin, from the station. He said, "Roust out—special duty. The Plaza Theater at State and Main. Panic and riot. Several known dead. Get going."

I got going, leaving Ginny still holding a hand she'd never play. I didn't bother about speed laws, of course. Traffic was thin and I made it in seventeen minutes. I parked a block away and went in on foot. Two hundred yards and the going got tough. It seemed everybody in town had beat me to the Plaza.

They'd roped off the street clear across, on both sides of the theater, and four mounted cops were shoving back the crowds that kept bellying the ropes. The roped-off section looked like the field hospital of a front-line regiment. Three ambulances had been pulled inside. There were cots, and two inhalator squads from the fire department.

The din was terrific, what with hysteria rampant both inside the ropes and out. I pushed through the last fringe of the packed crowd, got inside the ropes and walked under the marquee. In the outer lobby three still, blanket-covered forms added just the right touch of horror to the scene.

Captain Quain was standing near the ticket booth wiping his red face and conferring with two John Does. I went up to him and asked, "What the hell happened?"

"We don't know yet. You're on investigation. Go inside and get to work."

They were just getting the place cleared of the last dazed and hysterical customers. They were taking them out the back; all except one screaming woman parked on the railing of

one of the loges. Four firemen were lifting a net over the seat and spotting it below the loge. It was wasted effort, though, because at that moment a uniform cop charged in and grabbed her from behind. He carried her, kicking and screaming, down the stairs and out.

AS I WALKED down the aisle a white-faced usher, seemingly in the middle of a sleep-walking jaunt, tried to brush past me toward the lobby. I got him by the arm. He shuddered and tried to pull away. I slapped his face once—sharply.

"Are you all right?"

"Yeah—yeah. I guess so. I need air."

I held onto his arm and said, "Take it easy. Just relax. Were you on duty when it started?"

He nodded and gulped. "Uh-huh. I had Aisle Two. I was almost full up."

"Where did the ruckus start?"

"I don't know. There was a scream. Right in the middle of the auditorium, I guess."

"You were inside?"

He nodded. "I went down the aisle trying to quiet them—trying to make them sit down. When it got... bad, I just ran."

He was having guilt reactions. I said, "Come here and sit down." I got him into a seat. "Now tell me about it—slow. Take your time."

He hunted for words. I tried to help him. "Did it start out with a fight?"

"No—no, I don't think so. Not that I saw. It was just a scream from—kind of—right down there." He pulled his fingers away from a death-grip on the arm of the seat and pointed.

Lieutenant Nicholson reared up out of the orchestra pit and came up the aisle. He said, "Hi, Craig. You on in-

vestigation?"

"Uh-huh."

"So am I. I've got two ushers corralled backstage. One says it started on the left—under the balcony. The other claims on the right further down."

"We've got the joint covered. My lad here says in the middle."

Nicholson slapped his pockets absently. "I need some smokes." He moved up the aisle.

I asked, "What's your name, buddy?"

"William Peters."

"Do you go to school?"

"Uh-huh. Mornings—at Steinmetz. I'm sure it was in the middle. I'd just started to walk down the aisle because the Chief Usher had called for a seat check. We're supposed to have a seat check any time he flashes for it, but I didn't have one and—"

He was coming back to normal. "You were saying about where it started—"

"Right about there." He pointed again. "A woman stood up and began clawing at her hair. I could see her white arms. She screamed and then turned around and looked backwards. I know that's where it started."

"Then other people began jumping up and yelling with her?"

"Yes, sir. After that it got kind of hazy in my mind with that first scream so sudden and—and everything. After that it kind of broke out all over. I heard someone yell fire."

Someone would. Someone always did. Someone deserved twenty years. "What kind of a scream was it?"

IT KEPT harping on that point because it was important. In the school where they teach such things, they tell you the timbre and mood of a scream can be the secret of a panic. For instance, the indignant yelp of a

girl who feels a stray hand touching her in the wrong place doesn't start a riot. It engenders curiosity and you'd be surprised how many people can tell instinctively why she yelped. Such a squawk of indignation actually brings smiles to the faces of a certain class of people.

The scream that does the business is a warble of pure panic. Inarticulate, it is still eloquent. Pure dynamite in crowded places.

"Well, you'd—you'd have thought she'd seen a ghost. A yell like you'd expect just before somebody got killed."

A panic scream.

"Got a flashlight?"

He fished one out of his hip pocket. I took it. "You sit here and relax. I'm going to look around."

I walked down the aisle and stopped. "About here?"

"A little further—maybe."

I picked three aisles and went through them, turning up the seats. Then I went through them again, slowly, using the flash. In the middle of the second aisle I stopped and got a little sick. I called out to the usher, "Will you go find that cop that stopped to talk to me? Tell him I'd like to see him."

The kid went away and I kept on searching the floor.

When Nicholson got there I was a little sicker than I had been before. I showed him. He turned white, even in the flash's dim beam.

He snatched out a cigarette, quick; started to stick it into his mouth. Then he gave it to me and took out another one. He lit them and we pulled hard—stood there enjoying the smoke. We needed it.

Nicholson glanced up at the balcony. He pointed. "About there, would you say?"

"About there. We should turn up

something."

"Maybe a basket."

We went up into the balcony and found the basket—smashed but still usable. We went back downstairs and we put the things we'd found into the basket and went to find the Chief.

The Chief isn't young anymore. Affairs like this poop him out. He was leaning against a wall wiping his face. "What'd you locate?"

I opened the basket. Nicholson croaked, "Some son-of-a-bitch stood up in the balcony and threw a handful of garter snakes down on the people below."

The Chief looked into the basket at the smashed remains of the reptiles. The silence was heavy—too heavy. It needed to be broken. Nicholson said, "Maybe there were more. Maybe some of them crawled away."

The Chief began swearing like an old man filled with a terrible fury. He swore quietly. That made the fury all the more terrible.

THE CATASTROPHE at the Plaza should have been the climax to the wave of deadly mischief. It fitted all the requirements of a climax. But within a week it was backpage stuff; in a month it was forgotten.

Affairs were fast reaching a stage where one man's experiences could not tell the story. It was getting too big—too broad—too serious. Suddenly, no city in the country—nor any group of cities—had a monopoly on this new madness.

Sudden, of course, is a comparative word. The next few days passed with only a gradual increase in lawless activities. Complaints in Western Heights, in Chicago, in the rest of the city's suburbs, became more frequent, and there was still enough novelty in the new activities to make them interesting.

In Chicago proper, some weird joker took his life in his hands by crawling up on a roof and connecting live electric wires to a video aerial. The set wasn't in use at the time. Its insides melted out. No one was killed.

They were repairing the pavement on Grace Street in Oak Park. They left a big hole with saw horses and lanterns around it. Somebody took the horses and lanterns away and stretched a dirty tarpaulin over the hole—a neat job of camouflage. A car dived in, going about forty. The driver went to the hospital in a serious condition.

It occurred to me, after hearing of that one, how hard it is to kill a person outright. Life is tenacious. People don't die easily. They live and suffer.

As the hooliganism increased in tempo, it was interesting to note the ingeniousness involved. There were no cases of anyone just plain taking pot shots at passersby from concealed places. But someone did clamp a percussion cap to a stick of dynamite and drop it into a garbage incinerator. At least that's what they thought happened. The incinerator blew up and killed the janitor who was busy refilling it.

No one tossed any chairs down from upstairs windows, but somebody poured a bucket of acid into the belied canvas of an awning. Three people were blinded—two partially, one completely—when they looked up to see if it was raining.

Nobody deliberately pushed anyone downstairs, but there were any number of variations on the cord-stretched-in-the-dark trick. The accident wards began filling up with broken legs, broken arms—and broken backs.

Some of the pranks were harmless—that is, in comparison to those of a vicious nature. And it was amazing to what efforts the pranksters went

to get in their licks.

Late on a Friday afternoon, handbills were distributed in three suburbs. They were well and authentically done, advertizing three pairs of nylons for seventy-five cents at Scott's; a closeout of men's suits for fifteen dollars at Walker's; a clearance of women's dresses at Field's for a top of two eighty-nine. Far more people turned up than could have possibly read the hand bills, so word must have passed from mouth to mouth. A special traffic detail had to be called out. Scott's closed at noon to save the fixtures.

A disturbing facet, from a policeman's point of view, was the stealth of the operations. Percentagewise, few of the tricksters were caught—far fewer than the law of averages demanded. Still, the lockups were full and all the bail-bondsmen took on added help.

Then word began to come in from other cities. Tacks, scattered in various streets, stopped traffic entirely in Peoria, Illinois. All the water in a small Iowa town ran bright red one morning. A local pharmacist was arrested for doctoring up the town water tank. He had no idea why he did it. Neither had anyone else.

In New York City, five solid blocks of cars parked overnight in a residential section were drained of oil. In many cases, the fact was discovered too late.

Flat tires became so common all over the country as to be monotonous. Residents of the Pacific northwest found dangerous hairpin turns in their mountain highways carefully coated with grease. Five fatal crashes were reported. There were probably more.

Some of the tricksters worked before a nationwide audience. The wires of a trapeze used on Kiddy's Circus, a coast-to-coast video show, tampered

with. Two performers fell before millions of eyes. One of them died later.

Four transcontinental planes crashed in a period of twelve hours. No proof could be obtained in these cases, but it was significant that all four flights originated in Dallas, Texas. The air field was closed.

I must have learned more from Albert Eckman than I'd realized. Several times I caught myself thinking in the terms he used: *The market has broken loose. She's running wild.*

TWO WEEKS after the Plaza tragedy, signs such as this one began showing up in parking lots:

PARK HERE AND BE SAFE
Your car under constant watch.

New services were offered:

TANKS AND FUEL LINES CLEANED
Sugar Removed From Fuel Systems

The police department had slipped into a twenty-four-hour-day routine without quite knowing how it happened. Longer hours—then still longer hours—until we went home only when we got so tired it was the only place to go. Seventy per cent of the force was assigned to patrol duty now, and not two men in a car either. Company on patrols was a luxury we could no longer afford. There weren't enough department cars. My '58 Dodge went on the public payroll.

We traveled the town, following endless routes. We kept our eyes open. We worked. A sort of grim bewilderment settled over the department, even as it settled over the public. We went grimly about our business—taking it in our stride.

I saw the strange lethargy broken only once—by Ralph Davis, a plain-clothes man who had gone back into a patrolman's uniform. He was plod-

ding past the desk on the way home. He stopped suddenly, as though a great thought had dawned. He said, "For crissake!"

Ryan had grown older—and grumpier. "What the hell's eating you?"

"It's—it's silly! It's just damn foolishness. It don't make sense!"

"What are you talking about?"

He waved a vague arm. "This—all this. A bunch of pranksters! That's all anybody is. It's all we've got left. The whole country's gone nuts. What is this? What goes on? Cops patrolling twelve-fifteen hour stretches with rock-salt in shotguns. Nobody gets arrested no more. No room for anybody to get arrested. Bring 'em in and it embarrasses the police force. It's a Russian conspiracy, I tell you. Them Reds wanta overthrow the country and they're doing it. What the hell—"

I WALKED over and dropped a hand on his shoulder. He went a foot in the air and came down facing me. He caught himself before he let fly at my jaw. I said, "Take it easy, kid. What are we going to do? Go home and give up?"

He'd been working too hard. He rubbed a hand over his eyes. "Maybe it's time we started using deer slugs instead of rock salt." His shoulders drooped as he went out the door.

There were a lot of strange faces in the station. Young fellows with only a white arm-band marked POLICE to show what they were. The arm-band and a badge on their hats. Raw recruits brought in with a shrug and a prayer.

I noticed these newcomers were not the same as the regular cops. They took a less serious viewpoint of the whole thing. Not that they didn't do their work. Washouts were surpris-

ingly few. But the smiles and the grins around the station in those days were always on the faces of the emergency recruits.

I followed Ralph Davis out into the street, homebound myself after a fourteen-hour stretch. Two arm-bands were patrolling the back parking lot and I had to show my credentials to get my heap. The kid who asked for it apologized. I didn't even bother telling him it was okay. I got in and drove home.

I found a note on the kitchen table:

Darling:

I'm over at Spofford's. Nancy died this morning and they're bringing her home. Mrs. Spofford will need me. Don't worry. I took a cab over. I'll take one back. There's canned tuna in the ice box and some canned beans. Get a head of lettuce out of the crisper. It's all right. I left it under the tap for over an hour.

*I love you,
Ginny.*

I wasn't hungry. Nancy Spofford got in the way of my appetite. She had been a bridesmaid at our wedding. A nice girl who made the mistake of eating lunch at a public restaurant near her office. The poison was a new one. The chemists disagreed among themselves as to what it really was. It took the stuff a week to kill Nancy—and others, no doubt.

The next day they closed every restaurant and lunch counter in the state. But not quick enough to save Nancy.

I went in, and sat down on the lounge and stared at the wall. I began feeling the way Ralph Davis had looked. Panicky. And plain mad. What the hell was all this talk about pranksters? Where was the connection between all this and Halloween? Hall-

oween jokes were supposed to have some semblance of humor. A girl named Nancy Spofford lying dead in her coffin. Funny? Three people trampled to death in a theater panic. Amusing? A commuter's local derailed by dynamite; five killed. Food for laughter?

But the fact had to be faced—there was something about this outbreak that was utterly different—not like anything that had ever happened before. I'd grilled some of those caught and had watched the grilling of others. It scared me. None of them were criminals. One in fifty had a record. And none of them had any reasons. They stared through wide bewildered eyes that kept saying: You tell me. I don't know. You tell me.

Completely different. Or was it? I tried to think. There'd once been a law on the books called Prohibition. The law said nobody could drink alcoholic beverages. The people didn't like the law. The majority of them thought drinking was okay. The result was a huge, centerless, unorganized, completely effective conspiracy to flout the law.

The people moved against the law in their own way. They didn't take guns and go to Washington and shoot the men who made the law. They even put some of those men back into government for new terms. But by common consent they nullified the statute. I felt I was on the track of something but I couldn't pin it down. I kept groping; the vagueness remained. I was sure of only one thing. Ryan's blessed assassins were in the saddle and riding high. I put on my hat and went out and got into the car and drove north. I wanted to talk to Albert Eckman.

I DIDN'T make Eckman's in one hop. There was a delay. On Bell

Street, near Harmon, a sewer cover was being removed. Sewer covers are heavy. It took two men. They had it on edge and were rolling it somewhere. I never found out what they planned to do with it.

They paid no attention to me as I got out of the car. Maybe they thought I just wanted to help. I never found out about that either. One of the men was over six feet. He weighed a good two-seventy-five and he wasn't fat. I didn't care about that. I spun him around and tried his jaw for size. His head snapped back as he let go of the sewer cover. The man on the other side couldn't handle it alone. It tipped his way and got him across the ankle. He let out a yell and went hopping away on one foot holding his ankle with both hands. He sat down on the curb and whimpered.

Even with the big guy on my hands, I heard that whimper. It was different. A sad, unhappy, bewildered whimper; a moan that complained to fate about gross unkindness.

The big guy laid a fist against my jaw and my socks sagged down at least an inch. But I'd been working long hours. I was tough and hard. In a way, the blow felt good. I went in and leaned my chin on his chest and went to work on his belt buckle. We devised a little duet, the two of us, there in the street. I hit and he grunted. One two—one two. Smack grunt—smack grunt. With the man on the curb whimpering out the overtones that completed the symphony.

I finally brought his chin down where it belonged. I hit it and he went down like a pole-axed steer.

But it was no great and heady triumph. It was futility and frustration. So I'd knocked the guy out. So what? Had it done any good? Across the city there were probably forty more men moving twenty more sewer

covers at that very minute. What the hell difference did one more make? The telephone company had two cars allocated full time. Four men who did nothing but go around town and put manhole covers back where they belonged. They'd take care of this one. Besides, anyone who couldn't spot an open manhole in these exciting times had no right to drive a car. I got behind the wheel and drove on north.

ECKMAN came to the door in a dressing gown, but he didn't look as though he'd been asleep. The big house was dark and quiet. I wondered if he lived there all alone, but I didn't ask and he didn't tell me. He said, "Ah, Mr. Craig."

I said, "You told me to come back if the country blew up in our faces. Am I too early?"

"I'm afraid you are, but come in, come in."

We went to a different room this time; a small, luxurious niche with overstuffed chairs and a small bar.

"Would you care for a drink?"

"Thanks."

"Bourbon? Scotch? Brandy?"

"Scotch, please."

Eckman did things right. He put a bottle of *Hudson's Bay 1670* on a table at my elbow along with seltzer and a glass. He took the same and we sat down facing each other—both armed with a quart.

"You said I was early. What did you mean?"

He shrugged. "Just what I said. The country hasn't blown up yet."

"My mistake. We must be looking at it through different glasses."

"So far as I know, the government hasn't even taken official notice of the situation."

He was right. There had been plenty of talk in Washington, but the only thing from the President was a news

coment that the state policing agencies seemed adequate. "The situation is entirely without precedent. They're probably as much in the dark as we are."

"No, there is a precedent—two in fact."

I tried to remember. "It must have been a long time ago."

"It was. During the latter years of Egypt's greatness. And, also, just before Rome tottered."

"How does the chart look?"

"Quite satisfactory. It reached its first primary objective today."

"You mean it tells you where it's going?"

"Time and distance are very important charting elements. A chart indicates not only how far a move should run, but when it should get there."

My nerves were in worse shape than I thought. "You're always so damned sure of yourself!"

He showed no anger. "That's quite true. The only thing a gambler has is self-confidence. Take that away from him and he's poor indeed. When a speculator loses faith in himself, he might just as well quit."

I POURED a drink. "I'm sorry, but, good Lord! There's more to this than a bunch of lines on a sheet of paper. What's *causing* it?"

"That's a big question. We'll have to take it in sections—or rather, from various viewpoints. The religionists would call it a punishment for our sins."

"That's silly."

"Not entirely. There are some lessons we could draw. For instance, did you ever stop to think how many blessings, how much of your safety, you take for granted?"

"I'm listening."

"As a result of superficial thinking, one might say that the policing

authorities of a land protect the people and see to their safety. But that is only partially true. I would say that not more than ten per cent of the people's protection comes from any organized agency. Ninety per cent of it comes from the people themselves—from their trust in each other—from certain responsibilities they feel toward one another."

"That's pretty general—pretty vague."

"Not at all. The steak your wife broils for your supper passed through a hundred hands before it reached you. Up to now, without thinking of it or even realizing it, you have trusted a thousand people not to drop a pinch of poison on that steak somewhere along the line."

"You've ridden on trains and trusted unnumbered people not to wreck it. Hundreds of thousands of your fellow humans have it in their power to poison the water you drink. Yet, until lately, I'll bet that thought never entered your mind as you drew a glass of water from the tap."

"In short, since the moment of your birth, your life has been in the hands of others—all your years have been at their mercy."

"A person certainly has the right to assume that others are decent—"

"That's just the point. Have we the right to take *any* of our blessings for granted? Religious leaders have always maintained that we should count our blessings—be thankful for them—remember them. Here is a case where a blessing we took for granted—the privilege of living safely among each other—has been suddenly taken away. Is it beyond all reason to call it a warning from God?"

I thought that one over before I said, "Yes—I think it is."

"You may be right, so let's take the most convenient reason we can think

of. Let's blame somebody. Who would you suggest?"

"The Russians, naturally."

"Right. This thing is being blamed on Russia by some very solid and responsible people. And they're sincere about it, too."

"You yourself aren't blaming it on either God or the Russians, are you?"

HE SHOOK his head and measured some scotch into his glass. He shot in soda—small doses, as though he feared putting in one tiny spurt too much. "No, I don't. The cause I see is more vague—less easily defined." He sighed. "That's what's so nice about the Russians. They're clear, cut and solid. You can saddle them with it in one short sentence and have it over with."

"You weren't blaming them," I said patiently.

"No. I blame it on a mental virus."

"That's pretty vague."

"I told you it would be. But let's see if I can clarify it a little. Please remember, first, that we are under a more terrific strain than any people have been asked to bear since the dawn of creation. We've lived for years at a speed that would have killed our great-grandfathers in a matter of months, and I mean that literally. We wander, dazed and bewildered, through this maze called the *Machine Age*. There is more concentrated speed in a single one of our years than was ever found in a decade prior to nineteen hundred.

We are told that we are the most fortunate people ever born, and no doubt we are. Luxuries and conveniences beyond conception a few scant years ago, are ours in this wonderful modern age. We can speak across thousands of miles by merely picking up an instrument called a telephone. Our food is in a box in the kitchen,

chilled to just the right temperature, and there is no delicacy on the face of the earth we can't order at a meat market or a grocery store." He spread his hands palms upward. "What's the use of going on? You get my point."

"I get your point."

"Ah—but there is a penalty we must pay for all this convenience and grandeur. These things are made to be used, and you've *got to want them*. Do you get *that* point?"

"I don't think so—quite. Everybody wants—"

"Certainly, everybody wants all these things, but few people realize *why* they want them. They want them because everybody else has them, and if any individual didn't want them, he'd be set apart as a freak. He'd lose face. His family would be looked down on."

"That's putting it a little strong, isn't it?"

"Not at all. Suppose you yourself chose to live without a telephone, without a radio, without a video, with the oil lamps your ancestors used, without a car? You'd stand out as such a curiosity people would point to you in the street."

I began to realize that Albert Eckman was a pretty deep thinker. Not straight maybe, but deep. "I'd never looked at it quite that way."

"But your subconscious mind does. And what's worse about this civilization we've built is that it's vitally entwined into the very economic foundation of our basic structure. We're riding the tiger and we can't get off. We've *got to* sell so many hundred thousands of refrigerators a year or a lot of people will lose their jobs and won't be able to pay rent and buy video sets. We've *got to* sell a million or so radios a year or a lot of people will lose their incomes and won't be able to buy food and automobiles. Our

research laboratories have *got* to come up with a new gadget every few years to take up the slack in the belt or we'll all come crashing down. Right now we don't even dare slip back to the level of ten years ago, or we would be in a major depression we might never get out of."

I reached for the bottle. Eckman must have seen desperation in the gesture. He said, "Maybe I better sum up. This is what I'm getting at: I firmly believe this thing we've got in our midst is a rebellion by people who don't know what they're rebelling against. It's a rebellion of the collective national subconscious. Deep in the subconscious lies man's instinct for true values. We haven't got very many true values in our current setup. Man's subconscious sees him beating his brains out for a lot of gadgets; working himself into the grave to keep a new car in the garage—the latest model video in the parlor—the current deep freeze model in the kitchen."

ECKMAN stopped to drain his glass. "Add two ingredients to provide more pressure and you've got this hooliganism. A safety valve pointed out to Man by his subconscious. An instinctive release to stave off breakdown and insanity. A defense which is, strangely, a form of insanity in itself."

"What two things?"

"A pair of nerve-crushers. High, endless taxes, and the everlasting cold war. This is a rebellion, exactly as the unexplainable dancing craze on the Middle Ages was a rebellion."

"I never heard of it."

"People suddenly began dancing. They kept it up until a lot of them danced themselves to death. They were rebelling against unrewarding drudgery that time."

"But this thing isn't affecting everybody."

"Of course not. Only those completely susceptible. The Black Plague didn't affect everyone either."

I knew there were some good arguments against him but I couldn't think of them. "Do you remember Prohibition?"

"I remember it well. What about it?"

"Nothing. I was just thinking they probably didn't have Scotch like this then. How could they?"

"They had it somewhere. This Scotch was made before Prohibition."

Eckman had been deeply serious during his lecture. He was relaxing now. The built-in smile had returned. He blinked at his glass and looked incapable of thinking beyond the percentage possibilities of a pair of deuces.

I said, "You mentioned a time element in your charts. What's the time in this rebellion of ours?"

"I'd rather not say. The timing element of graphs is tricky. A graph can build time as it goes along."

Very enlightening. "What's your last word, Mr. Eckman?"

He got up from his chair. "Don't sell this market. It will tear your head off."

I was beginning to get the lingo. "It's going higher then?"

"Much higher."

I said goodbye to my host and went out and got into my car. I drove three blocks and my right front tire blew. I checked it. One of the blessed assassins had got at it with a knife.

THE MARKET went much higher in a very short time. On the following Thursday, the National Association of Railways announced that, until further notice, no train in the United States would travel beyond a speed of

twenty-five miles per hour. It was a difficult manifesto in that the railroads were forced to recognize a situation that did not exist officially. The Federal Government had taken no notice of it.

This, probably, because the leaders were at a loss as to how to proceed. What did one say in such a situation? "Fellow citizens—please leave all sewer lids over the holes in the streets they were built to cover. Also, it is not cricket to put sugar in gasoline tanks nor to connect live electric wires to video antennas. Poisoning food is an offense liable to prosecution by local authorities. Take care! Another thing—you are requested to refrain from throwing garter snakes into crowded theaters."

Possibly the Federal policy of hands off welled from political instinct; an instinct highly developed among those who bid for public support. Maybe public officials sensed one of the greatest phenomena of this period—an astounding public lethargy. Even more—a resentment against anyone who tried to spearhead a counter-movement.

The national weekly, OUR TIMES, saw an opportunity to be first on the bandwagon. They published a scathing article saying exactly what was crying to be said. That issue of OUR TIMES lay in large, unsold piles on the newsstands. The public wrote no letters of indignation. They did nothing at all—except that they quit buying the leading picture magazine in the nation.

This was not lost on the news commentators. The crusading element of this brotherhood had been handling the subject in a gingerly fashion—at arm's length—floundering for a policy. After the OUR TIMES fiasco, the only safe policy became speedily ap-

parent. *Hands off.* They heeded the warning and there followed such a wave of objective reporting that the people, for the first time since the invention of movable type, got entirely unbiased news reports.

Radio and video comedians got a directive from the fate of Lee Boorman, the free and easy genius who, single-handed, kept the Martin Soup program at the top of the Keeler ratings. He fashioned some humorous patter around the Des Moines window-painting episode. The public, desperately in need of canned foods, promptly began avoiding Martin's soups as though plague germs rode in each can. Lee Boorman was replaced the following week. The public resumed its buying overnight.

This last shook merchandising men right down to their shoe laces. A public that could strike back with such speed was a dangerous public. And in the face of such a swift and bewildering boycott, advertising itself became a potential menace to the sponsor. Many of the larger manufacturers, suddenly terrorized at the sight of a microphone or a video camera, held their breath, closed their eyes, and cancelled their programs.

They opened their eyes to find themselves still in business. Evidently the public didn't object.

A MAN RUNNING for sheriff in an obscure Pennsylvania town got nationwide publicity for a novel campaign weapon he used against his then incumbent opponent. "What," bellowed this candidate, "has Bill Fleming ever done for the town except fill the jails so full a man couldn't get in if he wanted to?"

This item, carried on the news services, got a nationwide yak. If it did nothing else, it proved a people in the

grip of a terrible menace still retained a shred of humor.

The courts ignored the grisly situation in their own way—by going resolutely about the business of ladling out justice on the same old stand. It is to their eternal credit that they did not back down one inch in this respect. Wrong-doers were jailed, tried, fined and imprisoned strictly according to the magnitude of their crimes. Those whose misdeeds resulted in sickness, injury, or death to others, were bound over to grand juries, indicted and cited for trial.

It was no doubt indicative of something that both grand and common juries—made up of ordinary citizens—did their duties as before. Indictments increased rather than diminished.

But no judge lashed out. No Bench rang with thundering phrases denouncing the almost complete breakdown of law and order. It seemed that a pall, like thick, black smoke, lay over the nation. Call it lethargy; call it bewilderment; call it fear; call it any old thing—it was there.

It is probable that all the people hoped desperately and silently for a change. Not only those who fell down stairways in the dark, but also those who strung the wires to trip them; not only those who feared to draw a glass of water from the tap, but also those who contaminated the reservoirs.

That may sound like a contradiction, but I don't think it is. Look at it this way: Almost everyone is against sin. Everyone wishes there were less of it in the world—not just the righteous, but those too who sin regularly because they are weak. These last don't necessarily intend to give up their own sinning, but for the good of the whole they'd like very much to see the other fellow give up his.

That was about how matters stood.

ANOTHER point driven home was the elasticity of the human animal. His powers of adjustment are something to write epics about.

This struck me forcibly one night as I cleared the spindle and started home. Almost without thinking, I checked the front steps of the station house before using them. As I rounded the building I walked at the far outer edge of the sidewalk. I showed my credentials as a matter of habit—without being asked—to one of the armed men in the parking lot. Even though my car had been under constant guardianship, my muscles tensed as I turned the ignition key. There were quite a few people in the cemeteries who had—as their last acts on earth—turned ignition keys.

When I pulled into traffic, I waited until the car ahead of me was fifty feet away. I kept that distance constant. The man behind me did likewise. The speed signs said 20 miles per hour. I respected them. Out further, the signs read 50 miles per hour. I would ignore them and go 20.

Halfway home I came to a grocery store with a lighted window. That was fine. I parked and went inside, hoping to find some canned goods. No one in his right mind ate anything else without testing for contamination. A can meant you could have a quick meal without stopping to use the ingenious testing kits that were selling like mad from coast to coast.

The canners had done a remarkably good job. While I stood waiting in the store for my can of beans, I read a big black and white poster on the wall. It was one of many such posters the people were reading, growing accustomed to seeing around. It said:

WE GUARANTEE ALL
CANNED PRODUCTS BEARING
OUR LABEL TO BE ENTIRELY
FREE FROM CONTAMINATION

OF EVERY DESCRIPTION PROVIDED THE CAN SHOWS NO SIGNS OF HAVING BEEN TAMPERED WITH. WE MAINTAIN A CONSTANT AND COMPLETE SYSTEM OF SURVEILLANCE NOT ONLY IN ALL DEPARTMENTS OF OUR KITCHENS AND CANNING PLANTS BUT ALSO ON THE FARMS AND IN THE ORCHARDS WHERE OUR PRODUCTS ORIGINATE. THE SUPERIOR BRAND IS YOUR SAFE BUY.

They meant it too. They had moved quickly, and with commendable foresight. There were no cases on record of poison found in a sealed, nationally advertised canned product.

As I waited, I wondered about this. Why was it true? Canned goods certainly challenged the ingenuity of the tricksters. Was a sealed can foolproof? Of course not. All you had to do was punch a small hole through the soldered center of one end. Slip in your poison. Resolder it.

I jerked myself up quickly. Was I myself getting ready to join the ranks of Ryan's blessed assassins? Of course not! But how did I know? How could I be sure? A lot of better men than I am had signed up. If I didn't know what it was, how could I tell how it started? Maybe you started by figuring out how to slip a little rat poison into a can in a manner no one would notice.

I jerked my mind away from the thought—savagely. Then the clerk gave me my beans and I went back to my car. It had been in sight all the time, through the big glass window, so all I had to do was check the tires on the outside. I carried a flashlight of my own now. I checked the tires and started on home.

OUT ON the open road I got a little reckless and eased up to thirty. But only for a short distance. The

lads who specialized on highways were plenty clever. They mixed their grease with ingredients that made the slick spots at the turns and on the hills practically invisible under street lamps.

When I got home I parked in front of the garage, opened the door and checked with my flash before going in. It was the smart way. Stepping into a dark garage could be dangerous.

In Portland, Oregon, they got into a man's garage one day and dug a two-foot trench four feet deep just inside the door sill, clear across. They put the dirt at the other end of the garage, but it didn't do the guy any good there. He stepped inside without turning on the light and broke a leg and four ribs. A man had to be careful.

I drove the car inside, took my keys and my beans, and closed the door. There were three padlocks on it. I snapped them all. On the way to the house, I played the flash on the ground in front of me. Ten yards from the door, I jerked back and threw up my arm. But there wasn't any danger. Without realizing it, I'd caught sight of the clothesline four feet over my head and had reacted. I didn't regret it, though. It was good practice. The way things were, you reacted quick or not at all.

I went inside and found Ginny using the tester on some shrimp. She caught my expression and said, "But, darling—they looked so good!"

"You can't just spot-check shrimp. You've got to test each one separately. It's the only safe way."

"I *am* testing each one separately. I've been at it all afternoon. I've only got four to go."

"Okay, but be careful."

"They'll taste wonderful—you'll see."

I turned and went into the back-

room and looked at myself in the mirror. There was still a red, dime-sized scar on my left cheek. I'd gotten a tube of brushless cream that was over fifty percent lye. Some patient bastard had squeezed out the cream, mixed it. Then he'd put it back into the tube. I wondered how.

I stood there staring at myself, listening to Ginny move around out in the kitchen. There'd been a time, I remembered, when a man kissed his wife when he came home. And a time when a man's wife looked up at him with a hunger in her eyes for something besides food. I could remember a time when the light talk came as easily as water out of the tap, because a man felt good when he got home and it was the place where you relaxed from the cares of the day. Now a man didn't even relax when he went to bed. A man lay there wondering if some guy would blow up his house that night in some new, clever way that would make blowing up a house a clever trick.

THE HUMAN animal's elasticity. His powers of adjustment. They're something to write epics about.

And women weren't excluded. I'd noticed something about Ginny; noticed it probably because observation was a part of my business. Now I never wore socks with even tiny holes in them; never wore a shirt the second day. Fresh underwear every morning. If anything happened and they had to undress me, nobody was going to find a neglected husband underneath.

One thing we did with complete freedom was turn on the radio or the video. They both had inside aeriels and that made them pretty safe. We didn't use the video much. There was nothing left to look at that anyone would want to see.

The radio was better. You could sit there and listen to them and wonder how long they'd be able to keep from saying what was really on their minds.

After a supper of shrimps creole, we found ourselves still alive and tuned on the eight o'clock news. There was an item of interest. The governor had put the state of Nevada under martial law. The move had followed the death of fifteen children after the collapse of a roof in a Reno recreation hall.

Evidently that particular governor didn't care whether he got elected or not. He was probably more interested in such trivialities as personal integrity. He issued a scathing statement the newscaster read in a flat monotonous voice devoid of any expression whatever. If I could have gotten my hands on that newscaster just then, I'd have rammed his microphone four feet down his throat.

Or would I?

Maybe every listener in the country was thinking the same thing. But would they? The same people had almost wrecked a national magazine that tried to do the right thing. They'd put a Chicago newspaper out of business and had caused a half dozen manufacturers to close their plants.

A THIN, high scream ripped into my ears. I whirled around. Ginny was sitting on the lounge, stiff as a statue. Her head raised so that her neck muscles were stretched tight. Her fists were clenched.

I went over and grabbed her. For a moment she fought. Then she wilted and pushed her head into my shoulder. Her voice was muffled. "Paul—Paul. I can't stand it! I'll go crazy—crazy—crazy...."

"Baby—take it easy. Relax. Everything is going to be all right."

She could have told me I was a stupid liar but she didn't. She cried all over my shirt, and even afterward while I put her down on the lounge and went to the phone her tears were falling.

I'd been going to the phone pretty regularly. I could dial Eckman's number without thinking about it. He always answered in the same tone of voice with the same word. It could have been a phonograph record.

"Yes?"

I talked through clenched teeth. "How long, oh lord—how long?"

You'd have thought it was a casual greeting. "Good evening, Paul."

"It's not a good evening. My wife just had hysterics."

What came over the phone might have been a sigh. "I haven't been able to give you much to be encouraged over, have I?"

I didn't bother agreeing. "What does the chart show?" It was crazy. I didn't believe in this guy at all. I thought he was a nut—a crackpot—a goof. But that didn't matter. I kept calling him up and asking because I wanted him to say it was about over. I wouldn't believe him but I wanted him to say it. Does that make sense? Well, neither did anything else.

He said, "I've been looking for the counter-reaction. It hasn't come."

"What is it and why should it come?"

"That is rather hard to explain. However, I can give you a ray of hope. This is the time to be very careful."

"Is that the ray of hope?"

"Yes indeed."

Was he kidding? The time to be careful was always. People who weren't careful were dead. I exploded. "Why, you damn sanctimonious self-

satisfied hypocrite—" I said more, but after a while I realized my fist was down on the phone cradle and I had broken the connection.

I HUNG up and went back and sat down beside Ginny. Neither of us said anything. So when the announcer's voice came over the radio—tense, tight, full of drama like in the old days, it hit a roomful of dead silence. Things had blown wide open.

"Ladies and gentlemen—a flash bulletin. Fifteen minutes ago a terrific explosion rocked Detroit's downtown section. According to first reports an entire city block has been demolished. Experts say it is the work of crazed vandals who—"

Crazed vandals!

The words hit me like solid punches.

"—planned the explosion weeks in advance. A great deal of undercover work was necessary in order to carry out the destruction. The number of dead and injured is of course not known at this moment. We will bring you reports as soon as they are received."

I was cold clear down in my bones. Eckman had been right that day I'd first met him: "*What do you see in the future—in terms a dumb cop can understand?*"

"*Heaven only knows. Bloodshed—a sudden and complete reversal of our customs and living practices. Anarchy—perhaps revolution.*"

He'd been a hundred per cent correct right down the line. Our old customs and living practices had gone long before. Now here was the bloodshed. The thing was out in the open. Anarchy. Revolution. They would be here in a matter of hours. I was not out of my depths anymore. A city block dynamited. The hooliganism was

over. This was something I could understand.

"Ladies and gentlemen. Governor Sprague, of Michigan, declared martial law. The army is even now moving in to take over the city of Detroit. An undisclosed number of troops under the command of Major General Harold Frost is approaching the area. Posters will be up within an hour. We will keep our microphones open for further reports."

All night the reports came. We sat there listening. It was a little like election night with the state-by-state report coming in. All the governors falling into line now the lid was blown off Iowa—California—I d a h o. A land bristling with bayonets.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please stand by. In exactly fifteen minutes we will bring you a message from the President of the United States who will speak directly from the White House."

I didn't remember going to the phone or dialing, but I heard myself say, "Have you been listening to your radio?"

Eckman said, "Yes, of course. It's been very interesting."

"The market finally got away. It's really running wild now."

"It always looks the strongest on the top quotation."

I didn't pay any attention. "It will be far worse now, but maybe not so bad because we know what we're dealing with. It's out in the open. The boys on top have finally realized it can't be cured by ignoring it. We're going to fight."

I jabbered on and on, not realizing it was only for release of the pent-up load inside me. The popping of the safety valve. I said, "She's running wild and the sky's the limit but it's out in the open."

Eckman heard me out. When he figured I was through, he said, "I'm selling the crop, on the close." He snapped out the words as though he were giving his broker an order over the phone. Then he hung up.

I hung up too, a little ashamed of my babbling. But it had lowered my tank pressure. I felt better. For no reason at all I went over and swung Ginny to her feet and kissed her. She kissed me back. Somehow, her pressure had gone down too. The President came on. We stood there holding each other, listening to him.

It was a fighting speech. He laid out the lines on which the coming battle would be fought. He called things by their names and said how it would be. I was proud of him.

He went off the air and other reports came in. Martial law all over the country. I hugged Ginny. "There's going to be a fight."

"I don't care. I feel like fighting."

The station didn't call, so we went to bed. It was nice going to bed—for the first time in months.

WE AWOKE in a heads-up town in an alerted state in a mobilized nation. The trouble was coming but we were ready for it—all of us against all of them. It was a good feeling. We were ready for battle.

But there was nobody to fight with. They were all on our side.

About noon I realized, dimly, what had happened. That it was all over. Right when we got ready to do something about it—it was all done with. The morning had passed without a single report of hooliganism of any description.

That didn't mean that there weren't any, but all we could go by were the official records. There weren't any re-

ports of any other crimes either until the middle of the following day.

Then a drug store was held up at Main and Central. A burglary that night in the Elm Grove section.

The next day crime increased, but it was good, healthy crime—crime a cop could understand.

Reports came dribbling in from around the country. In Detroit they got the dynamiters. One of them was a respectable business man who'd never been in jail. He didn't know why he'd done it, but the radio commentators did and they didn't hesitate to speak out. They called him a degenerate low-life.

It wasn't until the fourth day that I thought to analyze Eckman's last words over the phone. Now I could read them for what they were. *"I'm selling the crop, on the close."* That was the way a chart man said a run-away market was finished. Eckman had been calling the top.

I went to the phone and dialed his home. An operator came on. "What number were you calling?" I told her.

"I'm sorry—that phone has been disconnected."

I got into my car and went out and rang the bell. Nobody answered. I thought of Best. He might know something. He did.

"Haven't you heard? Eckman got cleaned out. The biggest upturn since restrictions were taken off the market."

"What restrictions?"

"They took them off four years ago. Up to that time grain could only move ten cents a day."

I wasn't interested. "What happened to Eckman?"

"The day after the President's speech, wheat went up fifty cents a

bushel. Eckman lost everything."

"Know where I can find him?"

"I think he's at the Clark Hotel."

"Thanks."

HE WAS at the Clark Hotel. In a shabby little room off a dark airshaft. He greeted me with his bright, built-in smile, moved a pile of charts off a chair and asked me to sit down. He was as cheerful as ever. "We certainly called the turn, didn't we?"

"Look— I don't get it. This—" I waved a vague hand.

He frowned with perplexity, but with no bitterness. "I got overextended. Very foolish of me, but I had every right to play it to the hilt. Wheat had a strong top over it—one of the strongest I've ever seen."

The chart was pinned to the wall. It had a great big head and shoulders top on it. The only thing wrong was that the market evidently thought it was a bottom. Wheat had gone hog-wild straight up.

I watched Eckman stare at the chart. He wasn't mad at it. It had only taken every dollar he had. Suddenly I loved the little guy. I'll never know why, but I did. I said, "Listen, how broke are you?"

"Not too bad. I think about ten thousand dollars in the hole."

"I've got a little money. Would two hundred dollars help?" I'd been carrying my last paycheck around with me. I took it out and signed it and handed it to him.

He took it. "I really don't need this, but I'm going to take it because I'm touched by your confidence. I'll make a comeback, of course. I always have. And you're in it with me. I'll make you a million dollars, my boy."

And I think maybe he will.

SHOE - STRING LABS

By

Tom Lynch



LONG-HAIRED scientists, huge industrial laboratories, and high-powered engineers have a habit of looking down their noses at the overalls-and-monkey-wrench inventor. University people tend to disregard the lone-wolf inventor, to hold him in contempt, and to assume that the only ideas worth considering come from professors. "The lone-wolf inventor went out with the 'artist in the garret' and the real ideas come from labs," they say sneeringly. That would be all right, even a bit funny, if it weren't such a serious matter; such an attitude is conflicting with the best interests of our country, whose future may be directly at stake.

You see, in back of every invention is an idea somehow stemming from the mind of *one* man, be he scientist or mechanic. Without this idea nothing starts. In ordinary industry the individual inventor can usually get a pretty good break because other men may be made to see the profit behind a successful invention. Look around you and you get the idea. Men like Edison and Kettering, Bell and Ford, were in no sense of the word scientists, but they were first-rate inventors and, because their ideas could be turned into dollars and cents, they succeeded—even though they couldn't, as mathematicians, add two and two.

But the immediate future of the United States hinges on military inventiveness. And it is here that the lone inventor with the brightest ideas get the dirtiest deal. Because there is little hope of profit, because of secrecy, and because the long-hairs are jealous, the average inventor with a sound idea or invention gets exactly nowhere.

But that isn't the way they do things in Soviet Russia. There inventors are rewarded in terms of hundreds of thousands of rubles for successful military inventions. Their tanks and planes, their success with

the atomic bomb and with radar, stem in great part from the efforts of individuals whom they reward lavishly.

Great Britain gave its developer of the jet plane, Frank Whittle, a half million dollars as a reward for his efforts, the gesture of a grateful nation aware of the enormity of his contribution.

In our country, the inventor of military devices has to beg the government to consider them, and then he's likely to get a kick in the face for his efforts, or they tell him that his invention is secret and that he can't come near it again because the government labs are developing it! These fantastic attitudes on the part of our government are costing us dearly. We kicked the inventor of the submarine and the machine gun and heaven-knows-what-else right smack in the jaw—made them peddle their deadly machines elsewhere.

We cannot permit this any longer. The government has got to realize that brains are at a premium; especially valuable are the unfettered brains of the individual thinker who can come up with another invention to strengthen our military establishment. The future is clearly going to belong to the nation with the best industrial power backing the best military ideas. The U.S. is lagging, and something has to be done—and in a hurry!

THEORY INTO FACT

IT WAS back in 1937 that scientists found evidence, theoretically, of the existence of positronium—a matter made of the simplest atom so far discovered, and which in its longest-lived form lasts only one ten-millionth of a second. Positronium is the result of connecting a positron, which is a positively charged particle of matter found in cosmic rays, with a negatively-charged electron.

Now, Dr. Martin Deutsch, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is experimenting to determine the *actual* existence of positronium, by measuring its gamma ray output, and also by measuring the difference in electro-magnetic force between two forms of positronium.

Credited with being the first man to actually find this matter, Dr. Deutsch says that from his experiments may possibly come a new source of intense atomic energy.

—A. T. Kedzie



Up from the gutters of Venusia, came Byron the Poet. His was the knowledge of every evil in existence. His was the ability to turn evil to his own designs of naked power

CHAPTER XII (Cont'd)

THE BIRTH OF A COLOSSUS

THE EARLIER years of Byron's life are shrouded in mystery. Perplexing mystery, of a nature which causes it to appear as the deliberate intent of some agency. That agency probably is History itself, as many interesting historical incidents are clouded in cloaks of fact, pseudo-fact, and rumor, until the truth itself is lost forever. (1)

Byron the Poet—a name our colossus took in his twenty-sixth year—was known by several other names in his younger years. The given name of Saul appears often, in historical records, attached to various surnames, which gives rise to the belief that Byron's youth was drawn as a composite, or rather a conglomeration, from several youths.

(1) *Sven Lundgrensen, The Five Assassins of Abraham Lincoln* (University of Chicago Public Matter tapes, 2113). These tapes are of interest relative to the point raised. For almost one hundred years after the assassination of Lincoln, his death was attributed to one John Wilkes Booth. Then, as a result of investigation by Lundgrensen, four other names were uncovered: Lipman Haywar, Jonas Deacon, Lemuel Carstairs, and Sam Bothman—all men died quietly and unobtrusively, out of the public eye—while all interest was centered on Booth. Lundgrensen found sound evidence that pointed to any of the four, as conclusively as any evidence pointed at Booth. The truth—the absolute truth—will never be known.

Gene Apporson, *The Mystery of Roosevelt's Death* (Smith Connolley Sono-Recording, 2006).

Manuel Gonzales, *The Enigma of Jesse James* (Berkley Associates, 1994).

It is fairly certain, however, that he originated from a violence done to Lia Norian in a deserted subway in Venusia. One must also conclude that the child born to Lia Norian, foster-fathered by Free Sorenson, became the man who later took over the Universe.

We have little other than unrelated data concerning those first years. Samuels, Byron's biographer and apologist, picked up his career during Byron's twenty-fifth year, obviously a matter of caution and good sense. Prior to that time it was far from clear-cut, and several writers lost their lives as a result of delving into the early years.

It appears that in his youth Byron indulged in every vice and virtue in the human range. That he tasted all the fleshpots of Venusia is almost conclusive. And there were many of these. Blanchard, in his exhaustive treatise on Venusia, can well be used

as a guide to the infamous city. (2)

There were exceptions to Blanchard's rule that all persons were corrupted by Venusia. Byron was not. From what we can gather, he was of Venusia, yet above it. He indulged in a great majority of the vices, yet went unscathed. He seemed to be more of an experimenter than an indulger. He could step into fire and come away unscathed.

The boy's foster father died, the innocent victim of a knife brawl, when Byron was nine years of age. To that point, the child had been well cared for. But after the father's death, Lia Norian drifted into the easier life and went swiftly into complete degeneration. An episode relative to this swift descent is contained in the voluminous writings of Frederick Yensa. (3)

(2) *Seven Blanchard, Venusia* (Temple Photo-Press, 2518): "In history there have been many evil cities: Chicago in its latter years, Scarlet New Orleans after 2000, Rome, Marseilles. But these cities had one thing in common: impermanence. Their evil came about from periods of instability. Temporary breakdown of law and order. The pressing forward of frontiers. Invariably, the change or natural passing of these conditions left the cities mentioned with nothing more than lurid pasts.

"The situation in Venusia was far different. There never was, is not now, and never will be, a change in the character of the frontier upon which it sits. Even Australia, the original penal colony of the British Empire, because of that continent's resources eventually became the home of respectable people. The Venusian situation will never change. There will be no expansion because no one wants any more of the planet Venus. Respectable people will never go there because there are so many other places to go, and Venus holds no natural resources worthy of the name.

"As Venusia has remained for centuries, so will it remain for an infinite time to come. The Universal Cesspool.

"It is a place of such fiber-rotting potentialities, few men can leave it unscathed. There, for some reason, all the vices take on a quality of frenzy. Sexual aberrations become what amounts to religious rites, so intensely are they practiced. The flights of physical and mental pleasure derived from a bewildering array of drugs, become things of such indescribable ecstasy, that deterioration is not regarded in any light save that of regret because of the shortening of pleasure-time. It is the only place in the universe where men and women accept certain death in return for one hour's pleasure in the grip of the unspeakable Dirna drug.

"It is the only place in the universe where females are brought carefully—and of their own choosing—through twenty years of growth, for a brief year or two of pleasure-taking and pleasure-giving.

"Venusia is a place where evil is as permanent and unchanging as the stars, and will certainly remain so."

(3) *Frederick Yensa, The Children Who Became Byron* (Biddle, Riddle & Rapp, 2418), states: "After the death of the child's father, the child became wayward, staying away from his mother for long intervals. The child, by skill or good fortune,

While the early Byron frequented every Venusian establishment of rot and corruption, he found time, also, to investigate and explore in worthier realms. There were no libraries, as

such, in the city. But several museums existed which served the purpose of the bibliophile just as advantageously.

In these, Byron spent a great deal of time. (4)

came to no misfortune from the potently evil environment into which he drifted. He had a talent for laving his hands in dirt and lifting them away without stain. He has been described as having the alertness of the fox coupled with the disdain of the cat and the sleek strength of the cobra.

"The child's mother was caught up swiftly by the slip-stream of degradation after the death of the child's father. At a time upon record, the child returned to his home to find the mother absent. He made inquiries and learned the mother had been seen in the neighborhood of a third-tier ecstasy house. The child repaired in that direction, further inquiry revealing the mother had not had the physical stamina to retain life under the impact of the drug.

"The child arranged to be escorted to the room in which the mother pursued the violent pleasure of the terrible drugs in common use. The mother lay upon the lounge provided, but stared vacantly and horribly at the child, entirely bereft of any recognition whatsoever.

"The child studied the mother with the abstract concentration of a doctor seeing for the first time, and having no personal knowledge of, the patient.

"The child straightened and observed, as witnessed by attendants, that the mother was dead. He exhibited no personal feeling whatever relative to the mother, other than a marked curiosity concerning the great expansion of the pupils of the open and staring eyes. He inquired as to the exact type of drug in which the mother had indulged; inquired as to the state of resistance indicated by her swift final submission to the drug; inquired pointedly into any other phenomena exhibited by the drug; probed and drew forth all information possessed by the attendant relative to the drug.

"The child, after gaining certain knowledge in this manner, made inquiry relative to the disposal of the bodies of those who succumbed to the drug. The child was informed of the general practice in such cases: that a disposal squad collected such bodies and removed them to a crematorium chamber for sanitary reasons.

"The child inquired further into the nature and character of the scavengers who performed this service. He gained enough knowledge to satisfy him on this subject, cast a last, casual glance at his mother's body and left the establishment."

(4) *Abdulla Aschcliem, The Explorer* (Beldonfort tapes, 2417): Byron delved deeper into literature than, possibly, any man of his time. He had the sagacity to search out the original version of any great work, or at least a version as close to the original as it was possible to find.

He put exhaustive effort into tracteries, going back, like a literary detective, through various derivations, corruptions, and provincial usages, to find the pure works of William Shakespeare, a seventeenth-century writer since proved to have been the father of an amazing number of present-day wordings and phrasings.

Shakespeare proved of such fascination to Byron that his works could be rated as almost a drug, *Julius Caesar* became universally required reading under his orders.

His discovery of the true Byron, George Gordon, Lord Byron, had a profound influence upon the great leader and, through him, upon the universe, when the leader adopted the early poet's name, mannerisms and, it seems, some of his poetical ability. In the meter and rhythm of the early Byron, the later one wrote a long epic poem he titled "The Prisoner of Chillon". The work had feeling, grandeur, and sweep. It was obviously as good as anything ever done by the original Byron.

A list of the latter-day Byron's greatest men who ever lived includes, at the top of the list: Christ of Galilee—Thomas Edison—Nero Vachielli—George Washington Carver—Alexander Hamilton—Leo Tolstoy—Benjamin Disraeli—Martin Carder—Walter Chrysler—Morgan Heaffner—Ledit Samonodatz—Julius Caesar.

It is interesting to note that Byron did not let his personal feelings interfere with his judgement. Introduced to Julius Caesar through the writings of Shakespeare, Byron made exhaustive investigations of the true Roman leader. Yet, in his list of the greatest military men who ever lived, Caesar ranks fifth. In Byron's mind, they rated thus: Robert E. Lee—Hannibal the Carthaginian—Rommel the German—Caesar the Roman—Napoleon the Frenchman (in reality, a Corsican)—Leibnitz the American. Robert E. Lee, it may be noted in passing, was also an American of an earlier time. He led the defeated forces during an American Civil War. With starving, outnumbered, underarmed forces, he drove back the opposing armies again and again.

There is ample evidence to prove that the later Byron did not write the original *The Prisoner of Chillon*. Beyond any shadow of doubt, the work was of the earlier Byron, and that his fame—in his own time—was based to a great extent upon *The Prisoner*.

The later Byron deliberately thefted the work, in the opinion of many experts. This cannot be proved, however, any more than it can be proved that Lionel's June 2186 address at Barnard was really given first at a place called Gettysburg by the then President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln.

In the Readjustment period of 1990-2020, many vast and thorough readjustments were made both in public thinking and the true origination of much written material. Thus, that period forms a wall against the past which is difficult to penetrate in the channels of literature or politics. That Byron did achieve this penetration speaks both for his ingenuity and for his absolute power. It might also be mentioned that Ascheliem wrote from expediency rather than lack of knowledge, in giving the later Byron full credit for the earlier Byron's work. Doing otherwise, in Ascheliem's time, would have been an excellent method of self-destruction.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FORMING YEARS OF THE COLOSSUS

AFTER passing rather sketchily over Byron the Poet's—as he insisted upon being addressed

—earlier years, we are able to pick him up—in his twenty-fifth year—and speak authoritatively, because we have Samuels' writings to draw upon.

Samuels was probably the most devoutly attached biographer of all time. He lived with Byron, having come under his influence during that famous time of the formation of the poets.

Byron and a dozen other young men formed, in Venusia, a rather loosely-knit club known as the Poets, a group which was destined to go down in history in song and story. The Poets were a strange mixture of intellectuals, wastrels, and degenerates.

But they had a strange thing in common—an evident love of literature, debate, and discussion. They chose to live on their issued subsistence, and thus had plenty of time for any activities in which they chose to indulge. These activities were many and varied. Although Samuels dwells upon it but lightly, all the depravities and vices of Venusia were practiced by them. But, under Byron's influence and behind his leadership, the Poets remained a comparatively high-type group.

At this time there was no indication whatever of Byron's ultimate role of universal dictator. In fact, he showed few of the necessary qualifications for the visualized needs of such a job. He possessed leadership, but it was an inherent quality which he made little effort to cultivate. There was no drive and certainly no great ambition in him. He led the Poets, not from design, but from the fact that they automatically followed him. His power over them, however, was great. (5)

(5) *Lincoln Samuels, The Life of Byron the Poet* (Temple Photo Press, 2490): "Upon this evening we had read poetry, as was the custom Byron had established among the members. We had been discussing the *Twentieth-Century Heroics*, and the works of James Joyce were brought up.

"Byron observed that Joyce was beyond doubt a person without honor in his time—

Samuels' relating of the heartless death brought about by Byron would certainly indicate a tremendous personality. We know that Byron had only that personality as an asset at the time. Any of the group could have walked away from him without fear of reprisal, without personal loss.

A compelling personality such as Byron's is hard to put into words. It is well nigh beyond descriptive phrases. Samuels tries, in a few words at the beginning of his history, when he tells of his first meeting with Byron. (6)

Samuels' words could strike one as a trifle ludicrous. They sound like the callow protestations relative to a juvenile love affair. But they are the opening words of a twenty-volume history, and the devotion lags not one whit through the whole twenty vol-

umes of this exhaustive work.

Another aspect of the scene Samuels portrays is that it reminds one of servilities before an established monarch of some sort. Certainly no monarch ever was subject to more abject adoration. It is interesting, therefore, to remember that here was adoration without apparent cause. Byron had nothing to give these willing subjects except the aura of his presence, and that seemed enough. Later, he gave them the Universe, but they had no way of foretelling this. And their love for him was no greater as a result.

EDITOR'S NOTE. The next and concluding installment of the history tells of momentous events, and hints at the fate of the unknown author who braved death in the interests of History.

despised by those to whom he was superior. All agreed, and Byron began thinking pensively concerning the long-dead great, and suggested, finally, some sort of tribute to his memory. No tribute, he said, would be adequate for such a man except death.

"He looked over the group musingly, then pointed a finger. The indicated youth arose without question. Byron indicated the most convenient manner of human sacrifice, whereupon the youth walked to the window and leaped four tiers to his death.

"After a moment of silence, Byron considered the incident closed and the talk drifted in other directions."

(6) *Ibid*:- "I had been invited, by a friend of earlier acquaintance, to the meeting of a group called the Poets. This group, he said, got together to discuss various aspects of life in general, and were thinking of joining permanently under one roof. Oddly, he did not mention the name of Byron. This I later considered the strangest part of the incident. At the time I was intrigued by the peculiar name of the group and their even more peculiar method of occupying their time. I agreed to attend.

"As I entered the room that evening, the impact was one I shall never forget—the impact upon me, of one man. Byron the Poet.

"He lay stretched upon a lounge at the far side of the room, partly obscured from my line of vision by the bodies of other members. Yet, all I saw was the part of him that was visible—nothing else in the room registered. I moved closer.

"He was slim, small-boned, and rather tall. His face was well formed, but not outstanding. The dark eyes, overhung by thick black lashes, were never still, yet they did not move quickly. Rather, they traveled a continuous, lazy orbit around the room. He was pale of complexion, and this was no doubt the only outstanding thing about him physically. Pallid skin is a rarity in Venusia.

"Yet, with nothing outstanding in his makeup, one could still feel the power radiating from him, and also the fact that every consciousness in the room hung poised in a sort of waiting attitude for whatever this man might do or say.

"I was met by my friend who, as naturally as breathing, led me straight to the couch upon which Byron the Poet lay, and introduced me. Byron smiled pleasantly, asked that my name be repeated, and seemed to be deliberately committing it to memory. This, even though merely suggested, brought me a glow of pleasure.

"Then my friend turned away from Byron to join others of the gathering. And I got the impression that he did it reluctantly, and with careful calculation as to the time he spent near Byron, knowing that it must not be too long.

"Within five minutes after entering that room, I knew where my future lay. With the Poets—with, more specifically, Byron the Poet. My future had been sealed."

THOSE TEMPERAMENTAL ROCKETS

By Charles Recour

G EDWARD PENDRAY, past president of the American Rocket Society (when it was but a fledgling), and intimate of Robert Goddard, the father of American rocketry, aptly summarized the aerial future when he called this "the coming Age of rocket power". In fact, in the last word of that statement—"power"—lies the whole explanation for the trials and tribulations that are today making practical rocketry advance at such a snail's pace despite the growing promise of the V-2.

With the fantastic success of the V-2 rocket, not as an instrument of destruction, but as a tool for reaching great distances and promising the conquest of space, many people in the field felt that by this time some sort of rocket would already have been on its way into space. Unfortunately, the step from V-2 and Viking to the Moon is a much more difficult proposition than the step from jet engine to rocket motor, or even from the gasoline reciprocating engine to the jet.

Let's examine that step a little more closely. Consider the engines that power an ordinary trans-oceanic or trans-continental airplane. The biggest ones in common use today work at the rate of 2,500 horsepower—and a plane will use four of them. To minds conditioned by a hundred-horsepower automobile, this seems tremendous. But, in terms of the step from the reciprocating engine to the jet, that power seems like peanuts!

Perhaps you've noticed that, when jet engines—and rockets—are mentioned, horsepower is rarely discussed. The reason for this is that such machines are better compared by considering their "thrust", that is, the force which they exert. It is perfectly proper to speak of the horsepower of a jet or rocket engine, but, unlike an ordinary engine, the jet or rocket works at a rate—that is, exerts horsepower—dependent upon two things, its thrust and its speed.

It's not hard to figure out the horsepower of a jet or rocket engine if you are given the thrust and the speed. The force of thrust is measured in pounds, the speed in miles per hour. You convert the latter into feet per second, which a minute's arithmetic will show you. Then you

multiply the thrust by this speed, which gives you an answer of so many foot-pounds per second. To get to horsepower you divide that answer by the number 550. That's all there is to it!

Then, the minute you start calculating the horsepower of jets and rockets, you come up with some figures which show what a difference there is between these new giants of energy and the old, familiar gasoline engines.

For example, imagine a jet airplane which exerts a thrust of 7,500 pounds (there are such engines—the British "Nene", to wit) and which is flying at, say, 600 miles per hour. If you go through the simple arithmetic mentioned above, it turns out that, at that speed and thrust, the jet engine is working at the rate of 12,000 horsepower! One little jet engine...

But even that is small potatoes when compared with a rocket. Look at the most familiar rocket we know—the V-2. When you figure its thrust—24 tons—and its speed—3600 miles an hour—you find that the horsepower works out to the incredible figure of about 500,000! Imagine a 500,000 HP engine in a little sliver of metal like the V-2!

It is true that the fantastic powers of rockets of this sort do not endure for very long; the fact that their burning life is measured in minutes shows that. Still, with such powers at our command, you would think that space travel should happen tomorrow. Why doesn't it?

The answer, of course, lies not in power, but in a complex blend of many things—thrust, fuel capacity, the velocity of escape, air resistance and, above all, the "toll gate of gravity". This latter is the real barrier, as we all know. We are situated at the bottom of a gravitational pit. To escape from this pit by any means whatsoever, by rocket, by gun-projectile, by atomic energy, by *anything*, requires a certain calculable measured amount of work. The "toll gate" cannot be passed except by paying the required amount of energy, and the fuels are still lacking. Therefore rockets don't go to the Moon—yet!

Sometimes people fail to realize the meaning of this gravitational barrier; they say, "Wait until an anti-gravity machine is invented—then!" But that doesn't make the slightest difference. To operate the hypothetical machine still requires energy—the Law of the Conservation of Energy demands it, and that's one law you can't violate. Perpetual motion is out!

Fortunately there is a solution to rocket flight with limited fuels and powers, one which depends upon the step-rocket, the rocket-within-a-rocket technique. There is no question that this is going to be the answer to space travel—at least in the beginning. Then some day the atomic engineers will get on the ball, build the engine with limitless power, and space travel on a grand scale will be possible. Till then—it's still a horsepower age!

IDIOT COMMAND

John Jakes

SOMEWHERE a buzzer sounded. I can't keep doing it, the man at the desk thought feverishly, his face haggard and weary. Four out of four....crazy....

The buzzer whirled again, insistently.

Slowly, the gray-haired man at the desk sat up. His hand slid across the desk top, like a pale, tired snake, to depress a release switch.

A section of the room's white wall slid quietly aside. A young man in Command uniform walked in dejectedly and placed a sheaf of papers on the desk.

"Well?" the man at the desk asked with effort. His voice made clear that he already knew the answer to his question.

"Expedition RC-5 to Luna," the young man answered as if he were reciting a lesson from memory.

"Landed above ground an hour ago. Photos and data excellent, as usual." Gesturing aimlessly to the papers he had put down, he added, "There's the report." He sank into a foam-rubber chair and tried to light a cigarette. His hand was shaking and he burned himself on the match.

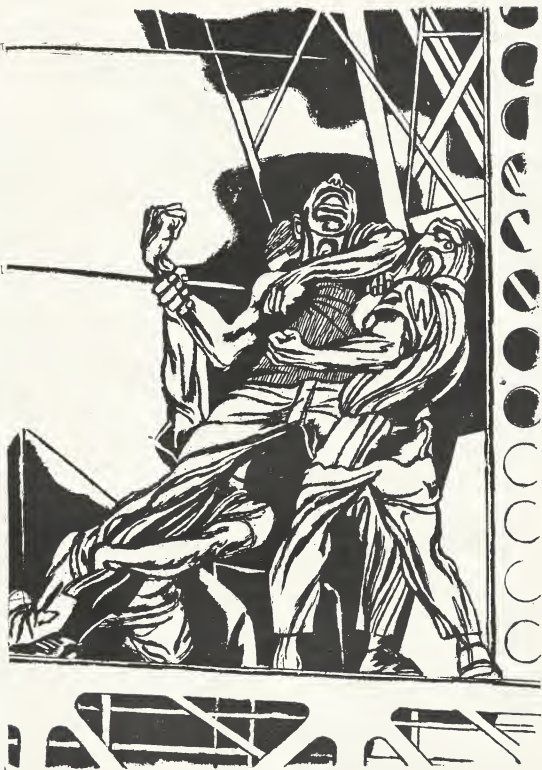
"The ship officer?" the man behind the desk asked anxiously, leaning forward.

The younger man inhaled deeply and replied in a flat voice, "Insane. Taken to Restrictive Prison."

Rising quickly, the man behind the desk snapped, "Damn it, Colonel, I can't do it any more. It's murder,

All the passengers on the Lunar rockets got home in safety, but a thing had been added — insanity!





The ship had become a steel-jacketed Bedlam

and by God I won't do it! Putting those poor devils away for the rest of their lives. It's been driving me crazy, but I've made up my mind—"

The colonel smiled bitterly. "Driving you crazy, but not like them."

"No." The reply was hollow and choked. "But not like them."

"Excuse me, sir," the younger man broke in quietly, "but you are Commander O'Hearn, Chief of Rocket Command, and you answer to the World Union. If they tell you to okay an order for a man to ride a lunar ship, you've got to okay the order. You know that as well as I do." He tried to crawl down into the depths of his chair.

From above ground came the muted rumble of testing jets.

O'Hearn paced nervously. "Colonel, I'm human! Five times now the Command has sent ships out to circle the moon. Every time I've had to order one man to ride the ship, because the Union says that the people of Earth won't sanction space travel without a human representative. The Union gets its money from the people, and we get ours from the Union, so we've got to listen, if we want to reach the stars at all. But I've had enough! To hell with all the goddamned people!"

He kicked the desk futilely. "Five ships returning to Earth carrying five raving idiots. It makes me sick."

"I don't like it either," the colonel said slowly, "but what can you do?"

"Stop approving the orders. Refuse to send men out there."

The colonel was disappointed. "Look, sir, you're just letting yourself in for trouble if you do that. The boys upstairs in the World Union are big. They play for keeps. All you have to do is balk once and you're through. They'll find someone to re-

place you, and he'll go right on doing just what you've been doing. He'll okay the orders, and you'll be out. You won't change anything by being out."

O'Hearn sat down, thinking, But how can I stay? That woman—the wife of the man on RC-3—Mrs. Loring came to see me. Going to have a baby. How could I tell her that her husband was picked by a machine, out of thousands of healthy normal young men, to go out in space? How could I tell her that I approved the order that sent him out, so he could come back a maniac? I had to lie—*killed in deceleration*—like I've lied to the families of the others—

He thought a bit longer and then asked, "Isn't there any way out, Colonel?"

The young man shrugged. "Can you keep from going insane?"

O'Hearn just sat there, not answering.

Finally, the colonel cleared his throat.

"Will that be all, sir?"

"Yes, that will be all."

TWO DAYS later, in the morning, the colonel came in again with more papers. He was obviously very worried.

O'Hearn, busy with a fuel requisition, didn't bother to look up. "What is it this time?"

The colonel said haltingly, "Sir—orders just came through. A new expeditionary observation flight to Luna. RC-6. To leave in four days." He stopped for a moment, gathered his nerve, and finished, "They want you to okay an order for a man to ride the ship."

The commandant slumped a little at his desk, smiling wryly. "Progress," he said. "Well, did you operate

the Selector?"

"I did."

"Have you got the card?"

"Yes." He put the white pasteboard in front of O'Hearn. On it was the name of a man chosen by the maze of complicated machinery known as the Selector; a machine that held files on every member of the Rocket Command, and chose one at random when the occasion arose.

For a long moment O'Hearn stared at the card. Then he reached out and deliberately tore it in small pieces.

"There will be no more madmen," he said softly.

The colonel gaped. "Did you figure out something?"

"No, but I won't approve the order. Even if I can't come up with a solution, there will be no more madmen."

Turning to go, the colonel looked back as O'Hearn finished, "Better get my papers in order. I may not be around for very much longer."

DOCTOR RUBEN came through the panel, sucking on an odious hand-rolled cigarette. He was rather a comic figure, with bright red hair and little blue eyes. His serious manner seemed out of place with such an appearance.

"Hello, Larry," Ruben greeted, seating himself.

O'Hearn returned the greeting and began his business.

"Doc, as Command psycho officer, can you tell me the cause of those men on the ships going insane?"

"I can infer the cause," Ruben replied. "They were top men, Larry—physically and mentally—when they left. So I'd guess that it was something out there in space. Maybe the emptiness, or the bigness, or just being alone in all that black. Whatever

it was, it got them."

"And what, in simple terms, do you think happened to them?"

Ruben lifted one shoulder expressively. "Again, an inference. But I'd say it was a kind of polar reversal of the mind. Positive to negative. Sane to insane. It took the brain and twisted it out of the established pattern exactly the opposite of the original."

O'Hearn nodded thoughtfully and then said, "I've got an idea about how to stop that."

"Good," Ruben said loudly. "I haven't thought up any solutions. A case of not being able to see the forest for the trees, or whatever. I must be lost in a technical jungle."

O'Hearn outlined his idea, pausing every so often to watch for the effect on the psycho officer.

When he finished, Ruben said once more, "Good. Very, very good. It's wild, but it just might work. At least it can't do any harm to try."

"We've got to try," O'Hearn said intently, "on the next flight. And it's got to be secret. If it doesn't do the trick, we won't have another chance."

The records were carefully altered. Separate compartments were prepared on the expeditionary rocket. Two hours before acceleration time, O'Hearn argued with a group of World Union representatives, and convinced them that there would be officers on the ship to satisfy the people.

A long ambulance rolled under the chilly stars and the cold bloated face of the moon, to the port of the great silver ship.

Some time later, the jets bloomed scarlet hell into the night, thundering as the ship rose.

And O'Hearn, whose job was only temporarily safe, watched the ship

vanish into the sky.

And then he began to wait....

THE WHITE panel slammed open. "RC-6 sighted!" the colonel yelled. "Radar screens making last-minute check right now."

O'Hearn was through the door and into the elevator in an instant. Riding up, he used the elevator phone to call Ruben. Four weeks they had waited. *Four weeks...*

Had they waited for madmen?

They stood on the broad stone landing field, and the wind from the stars whipped their uniforms in flapping sighs. The moon was there again, a pale face peering down at the world.

The ship came down suddenly, a great silver bulge erupting from the sky. It settled on its stern jets and the automatic piloting tapes clicked off. O'Hearn felt sweat trickling down his palms.

Five men walked out on the landing platform that had been moved up beside the ship.

O'Hearn began to laugh. "They're sane! By God, they're sane!" Ruben grinned, chewing on a freshly rolled cigarette.

As they ran across the field toward the ship, the colonel was clamoring for an explanation. Ruben outlined his ideas on mental reversal.

"The experience of being in space,"

he yelled as he ran, "seemed to take the men and twist their normal mental patterns into just the reverse—insanity."

As if emerging from a dream, the five men from the ship were standing around the foot of the landing ladder, talking in an excited but quite normal manner.

The colonel still demanded further explanation.

"Dammit," yelled Ruben irritably, "those men had their mental patterns completely reversed on the trip. They're the five men from the previous trips. We took them out of Restrictive Prison and when we put them on the ship they were completely insane. The cycle worked out. Sane to insane and back to sane—"

The colonel stopped in the middle of the field.

But O'Hearn ran on, clapping the men on the shoulders and shaking their hands. Ruben did the same, thinking, people won't like this for a while. But think of all the ones we can help—the asylums we can clean out. Shock therapy—a trip to the stars.

Doctor Ruben laughed out loud. And O'Hearn was almost sobbing with happiness.

"Let's get drunk," O'Hearn was shouting to Ruben and the five young men. "Let's all get roaring drunk!"

THE END

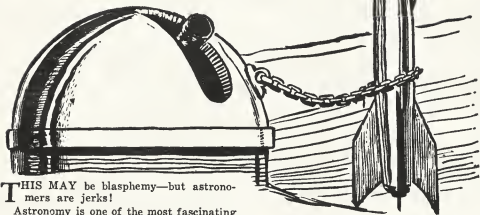
WHEN VOLCANOES FALL

IN THE northern part of Sonora, Mexico, is a mile-wide hole in the earth's surface which, according to geologist Dr. R. H. Jahns of the California Institute of Technology, is a collapsed volcano which disappeared about 25,000 years ago.

Dr. Jahns pictures the vast volcano rock as shuddering, then falling into the earth somewhat like a piston dropping into an almost circular cylinder. The crater resulting from the fallen volcano is almost a mile in diameter; its maximum depth is 800 feet. There's a thickness of basalt—a fine-grained rock of volcanic origin—on the walls of the crater. —Omar Booth

ASTRONOMERS ARE JERKS

By Leland Wing



THIS MAY be blasphemy—but astronomers are jerks!

Astronomy is one of the most fascinating of sciences. Its concern with the remote magnificence of the Solar System and the universes of outer space should give, one would think, any astronomer not only a detached objectivity, but also a sense of fiery enthusiasm for our present age, which promises to put his telescopes on the Moon. Anyone who boasts a modest training of science can see the handwriting on the wall—Man is soon going into space! Physicists, engineers, and technicians of every variety recognize that the day of the rocket is here and space travel—if only to the Moon—is merely a decade or so away. In a phrase, everyone expects space travel shortly—except the astronomers!

Accustomed as they are to thinking in terms of the vastness of the Solar System, you would think that astronomers would have no hesitation in the nearness at hand of appreciating Man's freedom from Earth. But they have. Astronomers are jerks!

This vehement barrage stems from the fact that, because of the numerous books and articles which have appeared on rocketry and space travel, and because of the tremendous popularity of science fiction, with the consequent popular interest in things astronomical, astronomers have been forced to recognize the existence of this enthusiasm. As a result, these books and articles are frequently reviewed in astronomical journals and semipopular publications.

Now some astronomers treat these matters with the sensible, optimistic and analytical attitude of scientists. But unfortunately there is a hard core of people associated with astronomy who review these matters as if the V-2, the Viking and rocketry in general had never been invented! These astronomers review the ideas of space flight with a faintly amused, whimsical air, much as though they were indulging children. "Amuse yourselves, little ones," they seem to say, "have your fun, but of course space travel just isn't possible."

This sort of attitude is infuriating to anyone who is aware of the revolution confronting us in science. Fortunately, most scientists realize that we are on the verge of space travel (think of the Air Force's Department of Space Medicine!), and consequently the views of so many astronomers really do not matter. An excellent psychological study could be made of the reasons which cause so many astronomers to have this negative attitude toward rocketry. Perhaps they're jealous of Man's invasion of their private domain of the planets and the stars!

This to such astronomers: Stick around, gentlemen! Men are going into space shortly, and when they start planting telescopes on the Moon, making your observatories obsolete, hearken back to your attitude of amused disdain—see who has the last laugh!



THE CLUB HOUSE

By Rog Phillips

AN ARTICLE in a recent *Scientific American* listed all the various theoretical building bricks of matter and energy. Quite a few, when you add them up. Such things as anti-proton, neutrino, meson, anti-neutron. Some of them are hypothetical in the extreme. Invented to preserve the law of conservation of energy. One thing seems to come out of this list of basic particles: instead of being basic in the absolute sense, they are as complicated in structure and in behavior as the atoms themselves. In fact, the article concluded with the thought that none of the current scientific theories is capable of amalgamating these basic particles under one system, and a new, unifying theory is badly needed.

In another field of science quite unrelated to basic particles we have equally elusive basics. This other field generally comes under the heading of extrasensory perception. Actually, of course, esp is to this field as light is to sight. Sight takes advantage of the phenomenon of light and the principles of optics. Esp must also use some basic energy phenomenon and employ some instrumental means of sensing it—if esp in any form actually exists.

There is always the possibility that there is no such thing as esp, in spite of the evidence. To show you what I mean, take the game of guessing cards. An ordinary deck with the four suits. Shuffle it and guess the suit of a card before you turn it over. According to the laws of probability you

will average three wrong guesses to each right guess.

But, also according to the laws of probability, there will be times when your average is higher or lower than this. There will be people for whom, during any trial period, the percentage of right guesses will be extremely high. If everyone in the world ran through this game in a measured test, there would be a calculable number of people who would guess every card correctly—and three times that many who would guess every card incorrectly!

That is where the experiments in esp break down in the last analysis. Even the experiments in thought transference break down in this respect. Yet, there is evidence of esp. The trouble with it is that it's so elusive.

I myself have had experiences that could only have been various forms of esp. To me they are convincing, but to anyone else they wouldn't be anything more than statements with no validity.

Let's take one of those personal experiences with a deck of cards to illustrate what I mean. It's a game of draw poker. I'm sitting to the right of the dealer. The dealer has shuffled the cards and I have to cut the deck. In cutting the deck one card slips into an ambiguous position, so that the dealer could place it on the bottom or top. The dealer places it on the top—and abruptly I have the strong feeling that I am going to get the losing hand,

but the other way I would have gotten the winning hand.

Okay, it's a definite esp awareness. Quite positive. I recognize it as such, and play along with it. I'm going to lose with a good hand. Since I would have won with that card placed on the bottom, it means the dealer himself will have the winning hand.

I get four diamonds. Everyone passes around to the dealer, who opens the pot. No one else stays. With this "hunch" I have, I would pass too, but I'm curious. I call the bet and draw one card. I'm sure before I look at it that it will be a diamond—and it is. I've made a diamond flush. The dealer draws one card too and, since he must have had jacks or better to open, it means he has two pair or three of a kind with a kicker, or four of a kind. Unless it's four of a kind, he'll have to have help to beat me—yet I "know" I'm beaten. He bets his hand. With my "hunch" I know my flush is no good, but it's worth more than the cost of the bet to follow this to the end. I call the bet to see the hand. It's a full house.

You could say that even this follows the laws of probability. For every correct hunch there are millions of incorrect ones. It may be that. But let's assume for the sake of discussion that it isn't.

What is the nature of the esp sensory organ employed? Did it in some way perceive the order of the cards in the deck, do some quick mental arithmetic on the deal to eight people, and arrive at the nature of all eight hands—PLUS what cards would be dealt after the draw?

This was my own personal experience. My own feeling is that it was extratemporal.

In other words, what I knew at a point three or four minutes ahead of the present influenced my present

thought processes. It didn't change my actions. Maybe it couldn't have, since that influence was predicated on knowledge of events that were to take place during the intervening time.

If we consider it in the light of etp (extratemporal perception), then no special sensory organ is needed. It's 100% mental. Future experience and knowledge influenced present thought in much the same manner as past experience and knowledge would have influenced it.

From the science-fantasy viewpoint, that is old stuff: time travel, etc., etc. From the viewpoint of strict reality, however, it is far more significant and, potentially, important than the atom bomb. Science has found no evidence that future events can alter present events. If such evidence were found it would undoubtedly change all our pictures and theories of reality.

If any event can alter any part of previous events, we have a reversal of cause and effect. Carried to its ultimate extreme, we could have purposefulness as a natural process of inanimate nature.

Our current picture of reality has it that neither the past nor the future *exists* in any sense of the word. All that exists is the present. The present configuration of all reality is the direct result of its configuration an instant ago, and will in turn produce the configuration that will exist an instant from now. That is basic to science.

My personal experience on the strictly mental level seems to have violated that basic—and it is only one of many such experiences. It didn't change the physical events. Assuming, in the example I gave, I *could* have accepted the "hunch", and thrown away my four-card flush without seeing what would happen, then I would have had no future knowledge

to have influenced that past train of thought. Nor would I have known whether it was a valid hunch or not. But if I *could* have thrown my cards away and not played them, then it would not be etp, but esp: knowledge in the now of the freshly shuffled and randomly cut deck of cards, plus sorting together five cards spaced eight cards apart through the first forty cards of the deck, plus burning the forty-first card, then placing the next two cards in two hands.

Extratemporal perception seems the more reasonable of the two alternatives. But there is still another possibility that psychology might pose.

A psychologist would probably insist that the ambiguously placed card captured my imagination. I clung to the thought of it, and followed events, not having any hunch at all. By pure chance and nothing more, the hands worked out so I made a flush and had it beaten by a full house. Then my imagination reshaped my memory of my train of thought, inserting a memory that I had "felt" I would have a good hand that would get beaten, that I had "played out the hunch" to satisfy my curiosity. The psychologist would claim that I couldn't agree with him because I had deluded myself completely.

He would claim it was in a well-known field of mental falsifying belonging under the heading of false association. You see something you have never seen before—and immediately "know" you've seen it before, some place, some time. Something happens—and you immediately remember a dream you had in which it happened, plus a long string of false memories about knowing the dream was prophetic.

What is the basic truth? Perhaps, some day, science will be in a position to study the problem.

* * *

Speaking of studying problems, I just received a letter from Robert R. Wheeler, 65 Canal St., Port Jarvis, N.Y., who has made a study of the CLUB HOUSE and compiled some interesting statistics.

On May 11, 1952, there were forty-seven published CLUB HOUSES, which reviewed over 200 different fanzines and about 40 other publications. Six hundred reviews: 116 in 1948, 111 in 1949, 128 in 1950, 180 in 1951, and 100 in 7 months of 1952.

I hadn't realized.

He sent a copy of the letter to *Fantasy Times*, which will probably publish it *in toto*. Six hundred fanzines reviewed! I'd better start working toward seven hundred right now....

* * *

TLMA: published for "The Little Monsters of America" whose dues are one dollar a year and include this fanzine. On the page that lists new members there are over a hundred names. This is one of the most popular and fastest growing groups in fandom, and well it should be. It answers more desires. For example, it has a program of forming local clubs that have regular meetings.

Lynn A. Hickman is editor of *TLMA*. Address, 408 W. Bell St., Statesville, N.C. Wilkie Conner is associate editor, and Arden Cray is art editor. I'm an honorary monster, and now my wife Mari Wolf is an honorary monster too.

TLMA is now bimonthly. I'm not sure what form of reproduction is used in printing it, but it turns out as well as photo-offset. Slick paper, full-size pages. The illustrations come out perfect. The contents this issue include "Dreamer of Mars", by Basil Wells, the only story in the issue. "The Dip of the Dowsing Rod", by Manly Banister, tells of his "personal experiences" in the use of sticks to locate water. I suspect it's tongue in cheek, but it sounds remarkable. In his hands, according to the article, the dowsing rod becomes a sort of Ouija board, answering questions of any kind. Manly states that either you are a dowser or you aren't, and if you are you can do what he has done with it. If you think you might be one, better get this particular issue, No. 3, April 1952.

The letter column is called "The Screamin' Deamons". There's 38 pages this issue. It's going to be reduced to twenty under the new bimonthly schedule, but you'll get more pages a year, coming out oftener. The zine itself is worth the dollar membership, and it's probably the least of the benefits of belonging.

* * *

VIEWS IN SF: 10c; monthly fanzine of the Baltimore Science Fiction Forum, published by Ray J. Sienkiewicz, 802 West

35th St., Baltimore 11, Md. If you live near Baltimore and would like to attend a meeting of the club to see what it's like, phone Dick Clarkson, WI-0001. His address is 410 Kensington Rd., Baltimore 29. Unusual phone number. You are invited to join the club regardless of age, sex, race, or creed. And, you know, that's almost an unnecessary thing to say in stf circles. We are the most unbiased group in the world. That's a natural thing. Prejudice generally springs from a type of thought which I call *localism*. You see it best in its extremes, where people in small communities in some sections of the country become completely class-conscious. Get away from localism and you get away from class or race or creed-consciousness. Get away from it as stfans do, divorcing your perspective from even the time-binding and planet-binding point of view, and you get away from prejudices of that type completely.

Gary Kratz, librarian of the BSFF, reports on some new books in the club library in this issue. Dick Clarkson announces he's planning to go to Chicago for the convention and wants riders. The bulk of the 18 pages is filled with reviews and articles of interest to the general fan as well as to members of the BSFF.

VARIANT WORLD: 15c; first issue, April; Shel Deretchin, 1234 Utica Ave., Brooklyn 3, N.Y. Which makes me recall one time in New York when I wanted to see the wrestling matches in Brooklyn. I called the arena and asked for directions. The directions were to take the subway at Times Square, transfer to the Canarsie line, and get off at *Utica*. Misinterpreting the Brooklynese, I almost went past that stop, even after reading Utica on the post.

Best of the contents is Wilkie Conner's, "Science Fiction versus Science Fiction". The conclusion he makes is of course that the fiction is the more important. Hal Hostetler has a pat little story, "Strategy in Hyper-Space". Shel collected some nice material for his first issue. Let's hope the succeeding ones keep it up.

CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION: 10c; published weekly by Ronald S. Friedman, Box 1329, Grand Central Station, New York 17, N.Y. A newzine with a staff of nineteen! That includes a financial adviser, no less!

Coverage is primarily of fan events, current and in the future. Glancing over a copy I see brief news from dozens of places where there are fans and fan clubs. I would say that this zine would run *Fantasy Times* out of business except for the fact that their coverage is independent. *F-T* stresses pro-news, *CSF* stresses strictly fan doings. Its circulation has zoomed

to seven hundred. Need I say more? Perhaps only this: *CSF* is the quickest way to get a cross section of fandom as it is—this week!

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c; twice a month; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 Thirty-second Ave., Flushing 54, N. Y. Nine on its staff, and no financial adviser, mainly because *F-T* is one of the oldest fanzines in continuous publication, has well over a thousand subscribers, and over the years has built up machinery to learn even the faintest whisper of anything new happening in the pro field. Photo-offset. Four three-column pages of small print and photo reproductions of coming prozine covers.

Besides coverage of the science-fiction book and magazine market, you learn what other magazines are running a stf story currently. You also learn which stf movies are appearing and which are in the making. And what books are appearing—such as my own hard-cover book, *Frontiers in the Sky*, put out by Shasta Publishers—which is scheduled for publication July 15th, about the time you read this.

FAN-VET: free to stf fans in the armed forces and overseas. Fantasy Veterans Assn., c/o Ray Van Houten, 127 Spring St., Patterson 3, N.J. This issue is devoted to details of the big Fan-Vet fund-raising auction, which will have been over for several weeks when you read this. The funds raised are used to send stf books and magazines overseas. This is one of the most worth-while movements in fandom. Besides Ray, there're James Taurasi and Charles Lee Riddle masterminding it, so you can be sure every penny is used wisely.

JOURNAL OF SPACE FLIGHT: April, official organ of the Chicago Rocket Society. If you haven't done so, you may get one free copy to see what this group has to offer—and it has plenty! Editor, E. Friberg, 424 N. Grant St., Hinsdale, Illinois. Regular meetings are held the first Friday of the month at 8 P.M., in Room 518 of Roosevelt College, 440 S. Michigan Blvd., Chicago.

The bulletin features well-written and carefully-thought-out articles on various aspects of space flight. This issue has "The Cost of Interplanetary Cargo Transportation", Part II, by Norman J. Bowman. A nine-page article. A book review is included in this issue, of "Guided Missiles", by Frank Ross, Jr.

A regular feature of the bulletin is "Rocket Abstracts", which consists of brief sketches from dozens of current sources of things of interest to rocket fans. And finally, there's one page giving the report

of the April meeting. I would be very much interested in the CRS's reaction to my book when it appears, since it's right up their alley.

JOURNAL OF SCIENCE FICTION:

Fall 1952; 25c; Charles Freudenthal, 1331 W. Newport Ave., Chicago 13, Ill. Whattayaknow! A real-as-life picture of Howard Browne on the front cover! And inside is a long article that very comprehensively covers the history of *Amazing Stories* for its twenty-five years of publication. A nice article. It calls me a mainstay of half a decade, whatever that means. It concludes with, "Its past is known; its future..." The author of the article is Edward Wood. "The Case Against Modern Science Fiction", by Sam Moskowitz, is an equally comprehensive article. It's too interesting and controversial to even begin to review. You should read it.

This is just the second issue of this zine. Photo-offset, it shapes up as though it will be around a long time as a leader.

NEWSSCOPE: 5c; Lawrence R. Campbell, 43 Tremont St., Malden 48, Mass., with six on his staff. Published monthly. Excellent news coverage, including news from England and Australia. Also pertinent comments on pro and fan news that make the zine well worth adding to your list of favorite reading material.

CONFUSION: no price listed; Shelby Vick, Box 493, Lynn Haven, Florida. Shelby is the one who's raising funds to bring a British fan over for the Chicago Convention. He's also engaged in organizing Florida fandom into one group.

His zine compares favorably with any 25c fanzine I've seen. That's an awful lot for free. Especially with names like Lee Hoffman, Rory Faulkner, J.L. Green, and Dave Hammond on the contents page. If you don't enclose a stamp or two with your request for a copy, you ought to be ashamed of yourself.

PHOENIX: 10c; bimonthly; Jeff Taylor, 983 W. Latham, Phoenix, Arizona. Digest size, mimeo contents with center section of hekto artwork, or rather, cartoons. Some showing the effects of various types of acceleration in space flight, for instance. A really thoughtful little story is "Prediction", by Dave Freid. There's a review of Mack Reynolds' book, *Little Green Men*, Phoenix Press of New York (no connection with this fanzine).

A nice little zine. Why don't some of you bnfs get together with him and get him more material? He wants it and needs it.

SF52: "free to those who write publishable letters." Richard Lupoff, 186-19 Aberdeen Rd., Jamaica, New York. Digest-size, with heavy green paper cover. Mostly a letterzine, but with an article, "Definition of a Stf Pulp", by Klaus Kaufman. He's also conducting a poll on prozine favorites. If you want to look it over and not write him a letter, please enclose a stamp. That's my suggestion.

SPACE MAGAZINE: 15c; David Ingraham, editor, 36 Liberty St., Apt. 2C Newark 2, New Jersey. Same size as *Fanscient* used to be. Photo-offset, with full pages reduced to one quarter.

Contents this issue, "Secret Agent", by James R. Adams, a nice little story. "Science Fiction Past and Present" is a department conducted by Bob Silverberg. This issue he discusses the history of *Astounding*, and not too favorably. "Reach", by Charles Schmidt, is another short story. The editor's page completes the issue. 25 pages.

WOOMERA: 20c; Futurian Press, 160 Beach St., Coogee, Sydney, N.S.W. Nick Sointseff, editor. Maybe you'd better send your 20c to his address, 184 Girraween Rd., Girraween, N.S.W., Australia. *Woomera* is printed, with a heavy red paper cover. Very nice. "A Survey of Fan Affairs", by William D. Veney, paints a very encouraging picture of fandom in Australia. Work on the first Australian Stf Convention is now in full swing. It was held March 22, so it's over now.

"Let There Be Monsters" is part three of Vol Molesworth's story running currently, and to be concluded in the next issue. A nice little zine. You'll enjoy getting it, and at the same time you'll be supporting fandom "down under". Where there's science fiction there are friends.

That's all the fanzines for review this time.

A month or so from the time you read this, the Tenth World Science Fiction Convention will take place in Chicago. I'll be there. So will a thousand others, judging from all indications. It will be in the Morrison Hotel in the heart of the Loop.

You will get to meet and hear Hugo Gernsback, father of science fiction, who is to be guest of honor. Practical-

ly every stf editor will be there, too. You will have your chance to bid for original stf artwork, including the originals of the covers of many of the prozines—perhaps even the one for this issue of *Amazing Stories*. More important than all this to the average fan, however, will be getting together with the many friends he has made during the years through the mails. Sometimes this brings surprises, as when last year at New Orleans Lee Hoffman was found to be a girl—much to the embarrassment of many male fen who had corresponded with “him” in a frank vein.

If you can possibly attend, do so. Each year at this time I wonder if this will be the last of the conventions until after World War III—or if this one will be indefinitely postponed because of World War III. I hope not. Somehow, some way, World War III can be permanently postponed, I hope.

None of us alive today can have the perspective to see our times as they really are. Regardless of what picture you may form of the future or what the future *should* be, in the free world you are suspected of some ism, if your picture doesn't correspond to some current norm-picture, and, in the world behind the iron curtain, unless your picture corresponds to the one pattern—shhh!

Perhaps a century from now the problems that beset us now will have been solved one way or another. The world may have by then sent ships into space, manned with colonists. That will bring new problems. Problems that may serve to unite the world downstairs in a common bond of need. Perhaps the new problems may come from a divergence of interests between those left here, planetbound, and those upstairs in free-void. Those problems too will have to be solved. Perhaps at someone's expense. That is the theme

of my book, *Frontiers in the Sky*. Most of the story takes place on Earth, but it concerns problems that will almost inevitably be facing mankind a century and a half from now. Problems that can be seen right now as inevitable, and whose solution may shape up the way I picture it. Since there is Sam Merwin's book review department elsewhere in the magazine I guess there's no harm in telling you you can order *Frontiers in the Sky*, by Rog Phillips, from Shasta Publishers, 5525 S. Blackstone, Chicago 37, Illinois. The first five hundred copies will be autographed, so if you value such things, better place your order quick.

Last item on the agenda this time is something a little out of the regular line covered by this department.

SWAPPERS MARKET LETTER: free. 719 Dorries St., Biloxi, Miss. Devoted to any and all people having something they want to swap, from a locomotive to radionics instruments. There's a Rotograph duplicator in good condition, cost \$125, swapping value \$75. Wire recorders, rifles, watches, and almost everything. Something like that might fill a real need for some of you. That's why I decided to mention it. Along with it is a story about the king of swappers, John Redshaw, of Granville, Illinois, who is 57 years old and weighs 260 pounds, and has several warehouses full of things he's accumulated from swapping. In a series of swaps he once owned sixteen yachts and never saw one of them. Want a banana plantation? He has one he'll swap. He traded a fountain pen for a straw hat, which he traded for a horse that came in. Traded that for an automobile which he swapped for 5,500 pairs of shoes which he traded for the plantation. Or something like that. . . .

—ROG PHILLIPS

SAM MERWIN'S

SCIENCE FICTION

BOOKCASE

THE MIXED MEN by A. E. van Vogt, Gnome Press, New York (\$2.75).

In this volume we find the peripatetic Mr. van Vogt in fine and full galactic fettle. The action takes place in a future era that finds humanity spread so widely amongst the planets of the myriad stars that a settlement covering the habitable worlds of fifty suns has actually been lost beyond trace.

It seems that, some 15,000 years before the story opens, one John M. Dell invented a matter-transmitter that caused the human beings who passed through it to suffer certain changes in the molecular process of transmission. Physically the Dellians, as they were called, became supermen (Mr. van Vogt loves those supermen!), while losing much of their creative power.

"Naturally", according to the author, these transmittees were called robots by the rest of humanity; many of them were slaughtered and the remainder driven into interstellar exile by so-called "normal" humanity, along with their human sympathizers. If someone would tell us what is natural or normal about any of this, we'd be grateful.

But on with the story. It seems that the exiled Dellians and non-Dellians have succeeded in interbreeding

under laboratory conditions, and their offspring, known as Mixed Men, are about as popular on the planets of the fifty suns as their Dellian ancestors were on Earth.

Their heredity leader, yclept Maltby, is trying to restrain his subjects from revolting to take over the planet group when a super-space-battleship from the home galaxy, commanded by the beauteous Lady Gloria Laurr, stumbles upon an outpost of the long-lost Dellian exiles while exploring the Magellanic Cloud.

From then on, of course, the main thread of conflict is maintained by Maltby and Laurr, a pair of proud super-souls, each loath to surrender the slightest prerogative. For side dishes there is conflict between the Mixed Men and the Dellians, between Maltby and a group of revolting minions and between the inhabitants of the fifty suns and Gloria's super-ship, to say nothing of a near-mutiny on the ship itself. The book is a sort of battle royal under the bar sinister.

If you go for this sort of kaleidoscope of helter-skelter ideas, none of them more than brushed in, you'll go for *The Mixed Men*. But if you want characterization, or the impact of high emotional wallop, you'd better leave Mr. van Vogt for the pterodactyls, especially this time out. He has done a lot better than this patchwork

quilt in the past. And we hope his dianetics activities will permit him to do better work in the near future.

We intend to devote the remainder of this column to a sudden spate of five handsomely mounted science-fiction juveniles that have been disgorged in \$2.00 units by the John C. Winston Company of Philadelphia. Under the joint editorship of Cecile Matschat and Carl Carmer, this venerable but alert firm has apparently launched a well-plotted campaign to capture the entire market of juvenile science-fiction readers.

In case some of you may be wondering why a publishing firm should launch five books of a new type simultaneously, the answer is that, by so doing, they have created a "line" at one swoop, thus establishing themselves solidly in the field. This is a thoroughly professional mode of attack for a big publisher, and one which gives the reader plenty of choice while becoming accustomed to the newcomer. It is a move well calculated also to give the small fantasy publisher fits.

It seems to us that Miss Matschat and Mr. Carmer have selected authors and stories wisely, although neither is widely known in science fiction. Mr. Carmer (*Stars Fell on Alabama*) is something of an archangel in American letters and Miss Matschat's reputation as a lecturer and regional historian is widespread. It is a pleasure to welcome two persons of such caliber to active science-fictioning. And it seems to us an indication of the stature stf is beginning to acquire in the literary picture that two such persons should have entered it.

Without exception, the books themselves are well and simply plotted and written and have been edited and bound with an astute eye on the

teen-age field for which they are intended. All of them are to a great extent successful in providing the exciting and informative material for which they aim. With this out of the way, let's take a look at the books themselves.

SON OF THE STARS by Raymond F. Jones.

Mr. Jones, one of the very ablest of the newer crop of stf authoors, tells a very simple and moving story of a modern youth from the American hinterlands, who stumbles upon the first Flying Saucer to crash upon the soil of Earth.

Ron Barron and his dog Pete also find Clonar, the sole survivor of the crash. Clonar, who is injured, is from the planet of a distant star whose people have mastered the art of travel faster than light. Ron takes him home and, abetted by Dr. Smithers and his girl, Anne Martin, restores him to health and learns how to talk with him.

From then on things get complicated. The military steps in, of course, and, ultimately, so do Clonar's people, who are quite competent to blast Earth to atomic particles at will. The situation grows increasingly tense and develops to a bang-up climax.

MAROONED ON MARS by Lester del Rey.

A chronicle of the first trip to Mars by one of the biggest, if most occasional, names in science fiction. The protagonist, Chuck Svenson, is a citizen of Moon City and the sole Lunanian selected to be a member of the first trip to the Red Planet.

However, dat ole debbil influence rears its Medusa mop and at the last minute Chuck is replaced by an Earthling. Outraged, he stows away,

manages to survive a crash landing, a number of mysteries, meets Martians and winds up a sort of Admirable Crichton of space.

This is straightaway narrative with plenty of action and suspense and comparatively few complications. The kids should love it.

FIVE AGAINST VENUS by Philip Latham.

Mr. Latham, a professional astronomer and occasional technical advisor for stf movies, here gives us a sort of Swiss Family Robinson—what do we mean "sort of"? He even names his family Robinson.

Unlike their prototype, this family wind up on Venus rather than a sub-tropical island—but otherwise they face transposed rather than new problems. What's more, they solve them with the unflinching amiability of the Swiss originals. But, in spite of its eclecticism, *Five Against Venus* is fun.

FIND THE FEATHERED SERPENT by Evan Hunter.

Mr. Hunter has reared his time-travel tale upon the classic basis of a large majority of such stories—a man

or group of men go back in time to discover the origin of a legend and create the legend themselves.

An obvious but ever-absorbing theme in this instance a professors son takes the trip with a group of university scientists to seek out the source of the legend of the white gods with which the Aztecs greeted Cortez.

Within its juvenile limits this is a fine piece of scholarship and contains enough action and surprises to keep the most cynical teen-age eyes glued to the page.

EARTHBOUND by Milton Lesser.

The weakest of the five Winston books, Mr. Lesser's story is still more than adequate juvenile whizz-bang stuff. Its hero, a Space Cadet named Peter Hodges, is summarily dismissed from the academy on the eve of graduation with honors, because of a minor physical defect.

In his disillusionment, Peter falls afoul of evil companions and finds himself enmeshed in a career of space-piracy. Space opera pure and perhaps just a smidgin too simple, but nicely stuffed with derring-do.

—Sam Merwin

JOVIAN JUNGLES

IO, EUROPA, Ganymede, Callisto—they have a lovely sound, the names of these large satellites of Jupiter. Unfortunately, astronomers stopped after tacking on four names. Perhaps they had good reason to, for new satellites of the gigantic planet keep cropping up in fabulous numbers. As of this date, the score stands at 12 for the number of Jovian moons!

If you look at a model of the Jovian satellite system, you get the impression of one of those stylized figures so often used to portray the orbits of a complex atom. In a weird configuration of elliptical or-

bits, twelve moons surround the planet, making it a jungle of satellites and a literal paradise for a potential Terrestrial visiting rocket ship.

It is generally conceded that the surface of Jupiter, along with the surface of Saturn, will never be visited by anything but remote television-bearing missiles, since they are fantastic and ferocious blends of furious gases and shifting planes. But the satellites are another matter, and the chances are very strong that many of them will bear desirable characteristics. Human settlements of one kind or another will be made of the Jovian satellites. They will serve as an ideal vantage point for navigational researches into the limits of the extreme outer planets, Uranus and Pluto.

—Jon Barry

THE READER'S FORUM



REPORT ON THE NEW FANTASTIC

Dear Ed:

I like AS and FA very much and I have the new FANTASTIC and it's some magazine. The way I rated the stories is:

"Six and Ten Are Johnny"

"Full Circle"

"The Opal Necklace"

"Someday They'll Give Us Guns"

"The Runaway"

"The Smile"

"For Heaven's Sake"

"Professor Bingo's Snuff"

"What If"

"And Three to Get Ready"

Best illos were by David Stone, L. R. Summers in "The Opal Necklace", and Virgil Finlay. Don't publish it oftener, please, because I have a hard time getting the different magazines now. I have 61 magazines and one novel, 25c-pocket-book form, "Sojarr of Titan". I have nine AS and 9 FA. Your June 1951 AS was pretty bad except for "The Imitators" and the cover was the same. November AS 1951 wasn't, including the cover, and the same goes for February 1952 AS. The March AS was pretty bad except for "The Gray Legions" and "Land Beyond the Lens". May AS same as November '51 AS and February '52 AS, but all in all the FAs I've got are better than the ASs I've got. "Medusa Was a Lady" was undoubtedly the best, most wonderful story except for "Rest in Agony" (that one was the best) and "The Man Who Stopped at Nothing" (second best), and they were all in FA.

Do you know of any stf club around Muncie, Indiana (Muncie is about 50 to 60 miles almost straight out from Indianapolis) or individuals interested in stf within about 15 miles?

Does anyone have any copies of July, August, September 1951 AS, and August 1951 FA? Is so, please tell me how much you want for them.

Delray Green
Rural Route No. 4
Muncie, Indiana

Muncie fans, rally around! —Ed.

MILT LESSER—PLEASE NOTE.

Dear Mr. Browne:

I am mad. Simply FURIOUS! You share some of the blame but Milt Lesser gets the brunt of it. There I was, all set to like him personally after I read the cover article about him. Then I read "Son

of the Black Chalice". This is the end of what could have been a beautiful author-fan relationship. I DO NOT LIKE the way the story ended. What a letdown. Why, oh why, couldn't it have ended with the extra-galactic men being supermen and the children of the Chalice staying supermen? I know that is the hashed-up, trite ending, but I just like it that way. I'm disillusioned. Now I don't even know if I want to be on the first rocket off Earth.

If that cover is a sample of girl-less covers, please bring back the girls.

Okay, I'm not mad any more. I got it all off my mind in the last two paragraphs and will now give with the praise.

I liked "The Frozen Twelve". Whose pen name is Tedd Thomey? "Too Old to Die" was very good and so was "Roman Holiday". As for "The Girl with the Golden Eyes", as Milton Berle would put it, "Eh".

Please, I don't like "Master of the Universe". HOW long is it going to last? No wonder the author didn't want his name known.

A few—four to be exact—Miami stf fans would like to start a fan club and would like to contact your other Miami fans. One of the best places to contact through is your letter pages. So—. Please write to me, all Miami and South Florida fans.

Also, I'd like to write personally to fans everywhere. I'm a she, incidentally.

Do you know what I like best about AMAZING? Your editorials. No kidding. I always get a chuckle at the cartoon but wish you would scatter them more liberally throughout your pages.

I strongly disagree with Saul Berman and anyone else who says "Do away with the Club House". I like it.

How come you haven't had any letters from Alice Bullock lately? She used to be in practically every mag's letter section practically every issue.

Rusty Silverman
1939 South West 14 Terrace
Miami, Florida

YOUNGEST FAN?

Dear Ed:

You might think me kind of young for your mags, but I am sure I am not the youngest fan. I am thirteen. I enjoy nearly all stf mags thoroughly.

The stories in the June issue were swell, especially the "Secret of the Black Planet". It was terrific, but don't you think

that the cover was—well, “crude”?

This was written to tell you how much I love sf stories; even though you won't publish this, you'll know you have me as a fan.

Margaret McLaren
322 Hallam Street
Port Arthur, Ontario, Canada

Keep right on reading sf, Margaret; then, in about seventy years, you can write in and tell us you're the oldest fan.
—Ed.

AND HOW ARE THINGS IN AFRICA?

Dear Editor:

Like a lot of your readers, I will start with “I have never written to your or any magazine before....” and I haven't.

I am not writing to criticize or to advise you as to your editorial policy. I know you know a lot more about it than I do and that it is very difficult to please everyone and his father. I like both your mags. Sometimes they are very good, sometimes plain good and rarely childish.

As you will notice, I am living in the Belgian Congo. Lee is a nice town, but as to science-fiction literature you may call it the back of beyond. I receive your magazines regularly over Belgium but would like to get back-dated copies of any science-fiction magazines up to July 1951. Maybe some of your readers will pity me and let me have some. I already answered several offers of sale in your columns but I am always too late.

I am prepared to pay a fair price, or to send stamps, or local curios in ebony and in ivory, in exchange.

Would you kindly publish this in your reader's page? Maybe some reader will be interested and send me something.

Andre Gallant
B. P. No. 2
Leopoldville, Belgian Congo

No sf in the Belgian Congo? Fans—get busy!
—Ed.

TRADER

Dear Sir:

Your reader's page is interesting and some good offers are presented. I'll be brief and try to get my offer in print.

Science-fiction mags just are not seen on our newsstands and I can only obtain an occasional copy of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES by devious means. Our magazine shops are loaded with everything else from 5c news magazines to \$1 French pinup mags. Most of our mags are never seen in the United States. Hence my offer. If any kind reader would like to shop for the mags I'd like Stateside, I shall send what mags he fancies from over here.

Would like someone (man preferably) to write and let me know his tastes.
Best Wishes,

Allan B. Spencer
27 King Street
Southport, Lancs., England

French pinup mags, Mr. Spencer? You'll be swamped!
—Ed.

THE MARKET PLACE

Dear Editor:

Lack of space is forcing me to sell approximately 300 science-fiction and fantasy magazines. I have made a price of 30c each, post-paid, regardless of age, rarity, or original price. All are in excellent condition. A stamped, self-addressed envelope will bring a list.

Does anyone want to sell the following issues of AMAZING STORIES: January 1932, with “Tumithak of the Corridors”, and February, March and April 1932, with “Troyana” at a reasonable price?

Helen Hirst
Twin Firs Handcraft
Route 5, Box 1191
Vancouver, Washington

ROG WINS AGAIN

Dear Sir:

I have just finished reading the August issue of AS and there is a comment I would like to make in connection with a letter in the Reader's Forum. I like the idea of publishing an annual of the best stories published for each year since the beginning.

As for rating the stories which I liked best, I find it a bit difficult, to say the least. However, here goes: “Black Angels Have No Wings” is my choice for first place; “The Return of Michael Llan-nigan” would be my pick for second; and third would be “Master of the Universe”. When I started the discussion of the stories I began thinking: I have read so many stories which are basically the same thing; i.e., “Black Angels Have No Wings” is a story of a past civilization that has split—there are numerous stories of this type. The same could be said for practically all stories contained in this issue. However, I read the mag from cover to cover and have been thoroughly satisfied for a few hours.

William J. Manning, Airman First Class
6612 Air Base Squadron
AF18313782
APO 23 c/o Postmaster
New York, New York

In college writing courses, they tell you only seven basic plots exist. Therefore, no story written is “new”. The fresh presentation—the new twist; That's what we watch for.
—Ed.

OF LETTERS AND WHATNOT.

Dear Ed:

I'm writing mostly to comment on letters and various other articles scattered throughout your mag.

Letters. George Stevens: I do not agree with him on the quality of AS dropping lower when Shaver took over. As I remember, you sold more copies than before and look at all the requests for more Shaver. Why, look at Vera Nehring re-

questing another Shaver Mystery in the July ish.

I'm all for the AS Annual too. My suggestion would be to put in all short stories from, say, 1930 to 1940. How about it? If you want response to Richard Lupoff's letter about a book, I'm all for it, with interest.

As to serials: Nuts to Gary Pickersgill. Can't he plainly see that Master of the Universe is the serial he's asking for? He also states that (June ish) GALAXY, aSF and OW are doing okay with their serials. Why not just let them keep on and you forget about it?

Hurray for Larry Touzinsky. I agree with him on the serials and down with the science facts. All they are is a waste of space and a bother.

Who cares about a life history of Finlay? I just want to see more of him.

My lineup for the August ish follows: "Formula for Galaxy I", "Black Angels Have No Wings" (love that Finlay), "The Winged Peril", "The Return of Michael Flannigan" (why didn't I like it?), and finally (ugh) "Master of the Universe".

If this missive sees print I would like all the fen ranging from 12 to 14 to write me.

Tom Piper
464 19th Street
Santa Monica, California

ANALYTICAL

Dear Editor:

Just a note to tell you that I thought your two short novels this ish were very good.

In my opinion "The Return of Michael Flannigan" was a terrific science-adventure yarn and beautifully written. It reminds me of Edmond Hamilton's "Star Kings".

"Formula for Galaxy I" was a very good story too. Tell me, how could Chavanne's robots possibly be forbidden to handle any weapon? Almost any object can be a weapon.

Now who could Lee Gregor be? Maybe a nom de plume for a writer in another field—a mystery writer, perhaps?

I thought your cover this ish was the best since the one on the ish containing "Land Beyond the Lens".

By all means don't make your artists illustrate a scene from a story if they can turn out better pics by merely letting the story serve to inspire them.

I remain eagerly anticipating FANTASTIC Number 2.

Naaman Peterson
1471 Marine Drive
Bellinghame, Washington

FANTASTIC No. 2 is on the stands now, and we promise you won't be disappointed. —Ed.

THAT LONG DELAYED LETTER

Dear Mr. Browne:

I have put off writing for a long time but I finally forced myself to sit down

and write to your superb magazine. I first started to read stf when I read Edmond Hamilton's "Star Kings".

For about a month, I read only PLANET and TWO COMPLETE SCIENCE ADVENTURE BOOKS. Then, by sheer luck, a friend loaned me an issue of AMAZING STORIES containing "A World He Never Made" by Edwin Benson. When I finished this masterpiece, I sat back and thought, "Wow! I've been missing!" Needless to say, I never went back to PLANET or TCSAB again. I have just finished "Return of Michael Flannigan" by John Bloodstone.

I missed "Land Beyond the Lens" but got in on "The Golden Gods". Bloodstone has, again, left himself open for another story. Please try to force one out of him.

As for the question of covers, long live the pretty girls! The August ish was superb with "Return of Michael Flannigan" and "The Winged Peril" leading, respectively. I would be very much obliged to you if you would print this letter, for I am trying to obtain back issues you have finished with, and they are still in good condition. I will pay 25¢ for each of them I accept.

Stories I especially want are: "Land Beyond the Lens", "The Green Man", "The Green Man Returns", "Return of Tharn", "Giants of Mogo".

If there are any stf clubs in this area, I would appreciate being informed. I will answer any letters I receive.

Long live stf!

Buddy Ball
3320 Moffet Avenue
Joplin, Missouri

We like pretty girls too, Buddy. —Ed.

ART CRITIC

Dear Mr. Browne:

As is the case, sometimes, I am writing to you before I have read the current issue (August in this case). Mainly, I wish to set about telling you what I think of the artwork in this ish. So here goes!

Illo for:

"The Return of Michael Flannigan"—terrible!

"The Winged Peril"—ditto.

"Formula for Galaxy I"—gah!

Cover—mediocre.

The only good illo in the whole ish was the Finlay for "Black Angels", which wasn't up to Finlay's best standards.

(You already have heard my reaction to "Master of the Universe"!)!

Whassamatter with you, LRS? As art editor, you gotta be more choosy!

Concerning Mr. Richard Lupoff's idea about an annual, I'm all for it, and I think, as does Mr. Lupoff, that such a book would be great for collectors, and I think it would attract enough collectors, if nobody else, to make it a paying proposition. Personally, I hope, if enough fan reaction merits it, that you will put out such a publication, possibly somewhat on

the order of the old quarterlies.

I have the first issue of the new FANTASTIC for sale, in case anyone's interested. It's in A-1 condition.

Ray Thompson
425 North 13th
Salina, Kansas

BLOODSTONE FOREVER

Dear Sir:

I have just finished reading your August issue. In my opinion, "The Return of Michael Flannigan" by Bloodstone was very good. Why not have a fourth in the series of his adventures? The first three have been very good; in fact one of the best series I have ever read. Bloodstone is a very able writer. Don't let him get away even if it means chaining him to a typewriter.

The picture on page 37 gave me quite a laugh. Louise is in her birthday suit and the story has her tearing her petticoat to help Lee. Was this a slip of the pen or of the brush?

I agree with the several letters asking for an "Amazing Annual". It would be very welcome to those readers who haven't read AMAZING before 1940. The trouble would be the selection of stories to reprint. If I'm not mistaken, AMAZING STORIES printed mostly serials, until recently changing this policy. To reprint two or three serials would take up a large amount of space. One complete serial would not be enough and printing two or three would cost more. This would bring up the problem of length of the Annual and, more important, its price.

The one answer I can think of at this time is a limited number of copies, on a subscription basis. Have hard-cover issues with a better grade of paper. Set a price and print a subscription form in each issue of AMAZING STORIES, so the fans can send for their copy. Enough on this subject.

The letter by Gary Pickersgill gave me quite a laugh. If he wants a copy of "The Man, the World, and the Norm", he will have some wait. To be more exact, 138 years. Or if he wants he might be able to invent a time machine and buy a copy in 2090.

I would like to hear from some readers who have read a book called "Dianetics" by L. Ron Hubbard. (Hubbard should be familiar to many of the old-time readers of sf.) I'm interested in what others think of the book.

If this letter is published and some of the readers write, you might not hear from me—for the next two years. The Draft Board is hot on my trail and I will be wearing brown before long.

Benjamin Lazev
2411 Woodhull Avenue
Bronx 69, New York

UNKNOWN-UNBORN—BOTH.

Dear Howard:

This month's AS arrived a few days ago, and because of final exams in school

this has been my first chance to write to you. So, have to.

Don't look now, but I smell a rat. Remember when you said that the two Michael Flannigan stories, "The Land of the Lens" and "The Golden Gods", went over so big that you had the author do another? Well, it would seem that he wishes to have 120,000 words of our hero, Mike, and not just 90,000. That ending hollers this: There'll be more, never fear. What do you think?

Upon perusing the contents page I was truly amazed to see that you had only five stories in this issue. Does that sound strange? It shouldn't. I am one of those who like a longer story; the longer the better. Some time in the near future let's try a 50,000-worder, huh? Or have that 60,000-word sequel by Wilcox in one issue instead of two. The stories were all good, with "Black Angels Have No Wings" taking first place and "The Return of Michael Flannigan" placing. This Lee Gregor isn't new, is he? Author Unknown Author Unborn. Which is it?

Cover—nice. I liked it. His best cover for you to date. Keep him at it.

"Men Behind Amazing Stories"—Hot ziggety dog! I've wanted a picture of Williams for a long time. Thanx.

Illos—Finlay was way in the lead with his piece. Boy! Words fail me, which is unusual. Reminds me of the Farnsworth Wright days of WEIRD TALES. One doesn't see this kind of work often enough these days. But what was it doing in AS? This is a stf mag, remember?

Departments—good. The Club House should be still longer, I think.

Remember in my letter to F in March I said demand would be great enough to warrant increase in publication? Well, I was right, wasn't I? Speaking of F, I can't wait for those colored illos. How could I sneak an advance copy?

That AS Annual sounds good. I could suggest E. E. Smith's "Skylark" stories, P. F. Nolan's "Anthony Rogers" stories, and E. R. Burroughs' John Carter stories. How about trimmed edges? Digest-sized?

It may interest Danny Scafer to know why we say we don't like this author's latest or why we thought this illo stank—or mine, at least. You may not find anything wrong with the stf you read. Others may have. If no one complains, no one will know it wasn't liked. If I don't like, I'll darn well let everyone know about it. As long as I shell out my quarter, I want satisfaction. If the only way to get it is to holler, well then I'll holler.

That's it, Howard. I think AS is coming up to where it used to be.

See you next month. Until then, I remain,

Henry Moskowitz
Three Bridges
New Jersey

*Only one thing wrong with annuals.
Such a long time between issues.*

—Ed.

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NOW YOU SEE IT...

By Don Morrow

A ROCKET designed for space is in some ways a relatively simple thing. It knows where it's going, there's plenty of time to plan the course, and there's no chance of collision with another rocket in the vast void. But rockets are long-range projects. Before the age of interplanetary rockets—in fact, right now—the problem offered by supersonic jet planes is a real headache.

Eventually jet planes will reach in higher altitudes speeds as fantastic as fifteen hundred or two thousand miles an hour. For all we know (security prevents much talk) such speeds may already have been attained. As long as there is only one such plane, things aren't too bad. But what about two or a dozen of them?

At a U.S. Air Force Medical School extensive research is being conducted on supersonic craft in terms of the problem of sight. Some very interesting facts come out. Imagine a supersonic plane traveling at fifteen hundred miles an hour! Since the human eye, which is to recognize this plane and which is the basic pilot, unfortunately has terrific limitations, such a plane will travel about one fifth of a mile before the observer on the ground sees anything at all! Further, because the eye-brain hookup takes around three hundredths to three tenths of a second before it snaps into action, the observer will not know that he is seeing a plane until it has travelled half a mile.

Also assume that the observer is an enemy pilot in a similar plane. After he has recognized our supersonic job, he has to decide what to do and, while his brain is mulling over this matter, the supersonic job has gone another mile! If the two pilots should pop out of the clouds travelling at their respective speeds and five hundred feet away from each other, they will crash into each other without ever knowing what has happened. At a distance of three thousand feet they will definitely collide, knowing what they have struck but unable to act before the collision. At a range of four miles apart they will have about four seconds during which they must recognize each other and decide what to do!

Obviously, supersonic aircraft piloted by human beings aren't going to be of much use as military weapons in view of the barrier set up by limited human vision. The answer to the problem, of course, lies

in automatic, robotic pilots—servo-motors coupled with photo-electric cells and computer brains. Only robot mechanisms like these would have reflexes sufficiently rapid to cope with such micro-second decisions as are demanded.

Push-button warfare of this sort is a long way off, yet it is easy to see that, as the destructiveness and complexity of military gadgets increase, men will be reduced to general strategy controllers whose robot machines will combat each other. The theme has been thoroughly handled in science fiction and finally fact is catching up with it. "We, the Machine" isn't as fantastic as it sounds...remember?

ATOMIC ARTILLERY

BURIED IN the back of most newspapers, just recently, was a little article which told of the government's allotment of an order for twenty "atomic cannon" to a locomotive manufacturing firm. And so, inconspicuously, a new age dawns for the artilleryman, an age which represents as big a step forward in weapons as the sixteen-inch gun is from the bow and arrow!

It is amusing to reflect on the fact that a few short years ago the experts were saying that atomic artillery was a contradiction in terms, an impossibility. They cited numerous reasons, among which were the supposed fact that bombs that small could not be made because of critical mass limitations, and that the firing mechanism, the fusing, would be shattered by the artillery blast.

None of these contentions is true. The fact is simple: there is atomic artillery, mobile, massive, and overwhelming. Details have not been given, of course, for obvious reasons. Nevertheless, a reasonably astute person can put two and two together and deduce the general nature of the new weapon.

Clearly, it must be in essence a modest modification of conventional cannon. That is, the projectile, which is actually a small atomic bomb, must be housed in a shell which is fired by familiar propellants, no doubt normal smokeless powder, although there is the possibility that some sort of rocket arrangement might be used. This latter is unlikely only because it introduces unnecessary complications.

The shell itself is the interesting mechanism. Whatever the shape, it must contain the miniature atomic bomb, fused undoubtedly by some intricate complex mechanism which makes an ordinary fuse look like an alarm clock in comparison. Very likely the fusing is of the proximity type designed to be set off by reflected radio waves, thus giving the artillerymen precise control over their projectile—not only its range but its impact height as well.

—Jon Barry

BEFORE HE LEARNED TO CLIMB

By Jack Winter

ANOTHER missing link was recently found in a limestone deposit in Czechoslovakia, a find that confirms the belief of some paleontologists that there was a half-ape stage in evolution before the development of the present-day gibbon. This theory runs parallel to that of the ape-man preceding man.

Bones were found of five *Pliopithecus*, which is a species of creature of the Middle Miocene period. These animals were formerly known only from the remains of teeth and skull bones which showed a marked similarity to those of the modern-day gibbon. But now the bones of arms and legs have been found, and while the leg bones are like those of the gibbon we know today, the arms are entirely different. The arm bones recently uncovered show a length in proportion to the trunk like that of the arm length of man in proportion to his body.

This new find suggests that maybe the gibbon didn't become a tree-swinging until just recently—say, ten million years ago.

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SPACEMEN DON'T PRIMP

—By Lee Owen—

WE WERE being fitted with new radars at Mexport, and Mercantile Command ordered us to pick up a new operator right away while Jack Phillips went back to Center for a refresher. He wouldn't go with us on the next Martian run; as Exec I had to remind Frank—Captain Frank Wilson—to put in for the radio-radar operator.

"There's no rush, Jim," he kept telling me, and the last week crept up on us before we knew it. He had to move.

I came into the cubby-hole at the outfitting building which we were using as our office. As I entered Frank was just switching off the videophone. There was a red flush to his face and I knew he must have been talking with Mercantile.

"Damn," he said softly.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Have they given you a new command? You look fit to be tied."

"I just called Mercantile for that radar-radio operator. You know what we're getting? Lieutenant Marie Lorning—a woman! I had no choice. Take her or else. 'No male personnel available and why do you object to a woman, Captain Wilson?' I really got chewed, Jim."

I laughed. "So what? Why gripe about women? Mercantile is having trouble enough getting competent personnel. You know it. Women make good operators."

"I just don't like the idea of some smart-alecky dame aboard ship. It doesn't seem right."

"Don't be so old-fashioned, Frank," I said. "What the hell's the difference? She'll probably be a knock-out. Break the monotony."

"She sure will! Listen Jim, I'll bet my bottom dollar she'll be some typical college grind fresh out of Central Communications, a figure like a life-boat, eyes fronted by inch-thick glass, a voice like a loudspeaker, and one of those I-know-it-all attitudes. I ask for a radar operator and they give me a woman! Hell!"

"Don't be bitter," I grinned. "We'll live through it."

Suddenly I was aware of a scent in the room. I turned. Standing in the doorway was a girl. She was no more than five feet two, her figure was like something out of the latest Videolife feature, and her long blonde hair was neatly arranged about a face that could have launched a thousand space ships!

"I couldn't help overhearing your description," she said in a husky, spine-tingling voice. "I hope you won't let your prejudice interfere with our relations as officer and subordinate. I assure you I'm quite competent, Captain Wilson, but I don't

know everything." She smiled then, and if I hadn't Mary's kisses still on my mouth I'd have gone for her. She was simply a knockout.

Frank gulped, turned red and for a moment stammered.

"Ah, ah, well..." he hesitated, then became brusque. "Sorry," he said, "forget the matter. Now let's talk about your duties."

It was a poor and graceless out, and when I left he was giving her routine details.

We took off at the end of the week for the usual Martian colony run and by that time Marie had made herself acquainted with all of us. She was swell. Everybody liked her. She was quick to learn; she was friendly but not intimate; and she insinuated herself into our routine life aboard the *Van Der Wahl* without any pretense or affectation. By the same token she got our respect. Of the eleven men aboard only Frank and the Junior Engineer weren't married so she didn't have to fight wolfishness very strongly. Carlos, the Junior Engineer, was a natural wolf, of course, and he went after anything with a skirt, but she stopped him so fast it was funny. We kidded the devil out of the Romeo after that and she must have really cut his wind off, because after the first few encounters he left her strictly alone. That would never really bother Carlos—women were food and drink to him, and whatever Solar port he put in, Terran, Martian or Venusian, he had "friends".

But Frank's attitude puzzled me. He simply didn't get along with Marie and several times she spoke to me about it.

"He just doesn't like me at all, Jim," she said, "and I don't know why. I do my job, you know that, but he rides me for everything. Still, don't say a word to him. I'm going to battle this thing out with him."

But I did speak to Frank about it. Nevertheless he clammed up.

"Listen, Jim," he told me once. "We're friends, but please don't mind my business. I don't like the girl and that's all there is to it! Women don't belong aboard space ships."

I couldn't reason with his stubbornness and so I forgot about it. Marie did her job and associated with us, and that was that.

The two-month trip proceeded without incident, less boring than usual, probably because of Marie's enthusiasm and sense of excitement. That was a pleasure, because space travel after a brief time simply becomes an overwhelming chore.

We made the Phobos landing approach as usual and Frank, Marie and I were in Control going through the motions. Frank had computed a quick orbital landing run-in and Marie had taken his figures and fed them to the radar-guiding link which would put us in automatically for most of the come-down.

She started her check computer and

then flipped to automatic. She studied her panel with concentration while Frank and I sat back and relaxed. She moved precisely and surely, but after a short while she slowed down, and a puzzled, hesitant frown appeared on her face. She glanced up nervously.

Finally she turned to Frank and asked, "Captain Wilson, are you *sure* that these figures you've given me are right? Seems to be a faulty correction factor."

Frank stared at her, astonished. Then he started to flush.

"Of course I'm sure!" he snapped testily, "I don't..." he stopped, "Wait a minute—let me see." He took a quick glance at the sheet she ripped from the computer.

"Oh, my God!" he said suddenly, "You're right! I must have forgotten that sine-function!"

Marie's reaction was automatic and instinctive. Despite the fact that this was her first trip, the training was so ingrained she knew exactly what to do. She flipped controls to manual, made her radar contact, and pulsed an "error-warning" out in a hurry.

Frank had slid into manual controls and the ship was quickly put in another refining orbit. And just in time. Five more minutes on auto and it would have been too late.

I left the control cabin without saying anything. I knew that Marie and Frank would have plenty to say. I was right.

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When I came back in, Frank and Marie were standing near each other, the autos taking over everything. He was half-grinning, embarrassed, like a grateful school-boy, and on her face was a look of serenity.

"Jim," Marie asked me, smiling, "Frank and I are having dinner in the Colony. Can you recommend a good restaurant? Frank and I want to talk..."

Frank suddenly laughed. "I'm a fool Jim," he said, "Spacemen can wear lipstick—you know that?"

"I never doubted it," I said, "Marie's a real spaceman...."

THE ROCKET WAY

•
By

John Weston

UNLESS a country is willing to devote a sizeable portion of its military effort to an enterprise of great scope, that enterprise will progress very slowly. There are two excellent examples of this. The United States spent better than two billion dollars on the development of the atomic bomb, and succeeded in completing that tremendous process in jig-time. The Germans spent almost two billion dollars on the development of the V-2 rocket, with what success we know. Even as of now, the V-2 rocket is still the world's record holder, and the greatest of all rocket developments.

The U.S. Navy has been working on rockets like the Viking and the Neptune, and while a certain measure of success has been achieved, the altitude record still stands for the single stage V-2—a matter of 114 miles, made in 1946. The Viking went up to a hundred and seven miles. The greatest altitude ever attained by man-made projectiles was the record, of course, of 250 achieved by a two-stage rocket consisting of a "Wac Corporal" perched on the nose of a V-2. Unfortunately, at that time no provision was made for photographic apparatus, and so the new Viking shot of the Earth—at 107 miles—still remains the record.

The Viking used for this 107-mile shot, was a standard type, 43 feet long and 32 inches in diameter. It was powered with alcohol and liquid oxygen, just like the V-2. At its highest velocity, it was doing 3600 miles an hour, or a mile per second! Unfortunately, all of these figures are still less than those of the V-2.

A considerable amount of recording apparatus was attached to the nose of the Viking, and recovered after the rocket had smash-landed back on Earth. In particular, in addition to the conventional cosmic ray recording devices, a special camera was provided to take photograph of the rockets flight from the rocket. This is, the camera was able to observe the Earth and some astounding pictures resulted. Amazingly impressive is the shot of the Earth from the peak altitude of 107 miles. The vast white area of White Sands New Mexico, the proving ground, is outstandingly visible against the dark background of vegetation and forest.

In light of the intensified war effort that is taking over the country, it is interesting to speculate on whether or not the government will make a more intense effort to develop high-altitude rockets. One school thinks that the stress will be primarily on guided missiles with their immediate practical application. This seems reasonable, but it neglects the age-old observation that long-range projects are often more valuable. For example, what would happen if we actually did manage to make Lunar flight possible. Think what a tremendous advantage this would give us as military power! That this could happen hasn't been forgotten by many military people, and they are plumping for the diversion of funds to the long-range project of developing Lunar flight.

THE USURPER

By

Roger Dee

AS THE covered wagon has been supplanted by the train and the automobile and the airplane—as the galley slave has been supplanted by the steam engine—so office clerks will be made obsolete by machines able to substitute for people in practically all routine jobs. These electronic brains will be able to do most such jobs better, probably, than human beings. They will be less erratic, less subject to mood and temperament, less subject to fatigue.

It will take about another generation before such machines are fully developed for mass production. At this point they are still less expensive to hire people, although character. For many types of jobs, it is still less expensive to hire people, although with the ever-increasing cost of labor, this may soon be prohibitive.

Where real imagination and creativeness are necessary, however, machines will never be able to replace humans.

MARTIAN MILESTONE

By Sol Overman

"PEOPLE don't remember nowadays much about the old chemical rockets, Jack; you don't have to worry about power with the atomic rockets. You've got enough and to spare. But it was different in the old days. You don't have to take off from the Moon. You can make a straight pitch from Terra to anywhere in the system—and maybe the stars soon. But with chemical rockets, we used to have our troubles. We had to fight for every precious milligram of fuel. Fuel was energy and energy was life. Now energy means nothing. Yep, it was different in the old days..."

That's the way they'll be talking about interplanetary flight some day when the atomic rockets are developed. But until that happens rocketry for the present will be established on a chemical basis—and that includes the eventual Martian rocket which is bound to come to development not too long after we succeed in planting a few manned jobs on the Moon!

We need the Moon desperately. There's a tremendous difference in launching a flight to Mars from the Moon as compared with launching it from the Earth. The Moon with one-sixth of Terra's gravity means that the take-off problem is simplified a hundred-fold. Consequently old Luna is going to be Man's first spaceship base—unless some energetic promoters manage to plant a floating satellite around our Earth—which is certainly conceivable—even probable. But assuming Luna as a base, what are some of the characteristics of the Martian flight?

Advantage is going to be taken, of course, of the relative velocities, which means that a rocket ship won't necessarily take off for the Red Planet when it is closest (about forty million miles away) to us. Instead, a long semi-spiral course will utilize the kinetic energy of the Moon-Earth system to give the rocket additional velocity toward Mars.

Also, since time won't be of the essence, much of the Martian flight will be "free"; that is, the rockets will be silent and the

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ship will be heading Marsward at a constant velocity without thrust. This is economical and efficient—though maybe a little hard on the occupants—but they're hardly likely to complain.

The landing and take-off from Mars will not be as easy as from Luna but they will be easier than the corresponding actions on Earth. Detached from the familiar science-fiction picture of the flight which has been given so often it's almost boring, the real Martian flight will be Man's greatest technological undertaking up to that time, dwarfing even the grandiose Moon-flight. For men are going to be interplanetary travelers in the exact sense of the word for the first time in all recorded history! Detach yourself from your hardened shell of vicarious experiences—which s-f has thrust around you—and try to imagine the feelings of the men in their tiny shell as it speeds toward Mars. Even to the most callous reader of s-f the concept is breathtaking. And some day—not soon—not distant—it will happen!

MERCURY'S NO PLANET!

By LINCOLN WARREN

MINIATURE MERCURY, circling the gigantic bulk of the Sun at a mere thirty-six million miles, is more like a satellite of that body than a planet in its own right. Outside of the obvious measures of size and mass, it is difficult to learn any details of the little planet because it is so near the Sun. Nevertheless, the slow progress of astronomical observation is adding to our general knowledge, and it is increasingly easy to paint a fairly accurate picture of what the planet's surface will be like when the rockets get there!

Recent studies completed at the Pic du Midi observatory in France confirm a long-held belief that Mercury's surface is, in all essentials, almost exactly like that of the Moon. Like the Moon, Mercury circles the Sun with one face always presented to it. This means that that surface is intensely hot at all times, while the far side is intensely cold, incapable of any radiation whatsoever. The Pic du Midi observers, using polarizing filters, discovered that the quality of light from the planet (by reflection) was identical to that of our Moon, indicating the same surface conditions. Mercury's surface is cracked and pitted and pocked and barren, just like the Moon's, a wasteland of nothingness.

The minute size and minimal mass mean no atmosphere. Mercurial gravitation is inadequate to retain air or gas molecules which have long since evaporated into outer space. The planet is, to put it mildly, "completely inhospitable". Spectroscopic observation gives no clue, of course, to the nature of the mineral surfaces, though it is believed that, as with the Moon, Mercury's surface is probably a roughened melange of powdered, fractured pumice, caused by the fierce erosion of high and low temperatures; this would be doubly true around the twilight zones which, because of slight eccentricities, receive most of the battering effect.

Mercury is unlikely to be visited by rocket for a long time to come, certainly at least until the day of the atomic-powered rocket. The reason for this is not hard to understand. Mercury lies, so to speak, at the "bottom" of the Sun's immensely strong "gravitational well". In the Sun's gravitational potential field, the amount of work necessary to raise or move an object through it is incomparably greater than that of the feeble gravities of the farther planets. Any rocket venturing only thirty-six million miles from the Sun must have an enormous reserve of fuel with which to make good the long back haul. Chemical fuels are patently out of order. No, until the atomic rocket becomes a reality, Mercury is likely to remain unvisited by men.

This does not automatically imply that the planet will never be visited because of lack of interest. So little is known that it is a certainty that sooner or later intrepid adventurers are bound to make the journey, in spite of the danger of venturing too close to the gigantic radiation furnace and atomic energy plant which is the Sun.

NUMBERS HAVE GHOSTS

By Sid Seeman

NO ONE who has ever encountered high-school algebra can forget the confusing experience of meeting with so-called "imaginary" numbers, those weird symbols idealized by the sign of the "square root of minus one". And yet, without these imaginary numbers, a whole field of mathematics would not exist. In a practical sense the whole theory of alternating current, for example, is dependent upon imaginary numbers.



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But then, invariably, some joker starts thinking and he comes up with the familiar problem of "what does the square root of minus one mean?" Frequently the answer is postponed until sometime later and, even when it's given, the student is always left with the queasy feeling that there's not something quite "right" about "imaginary" numbers. You can't locate them on the line-scale like the other real numbers. This strengthens the impression that imaginary numbers are in truth "imaginary".

Actually that isn't the case at all, as Gauss and a half dozen other mathematicians demonstrated almost simultaneously.

They clarified the fact that a so-called imaginary number is nothing but a number which arises in the solution of equations. It responds to the laws of algebra and works unmythetically. The only trouble that seemed to come from this logical treatment is that a physical picture couldn't be made, as it can with ordinary rational numbers.

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